

UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA

NICHOLAS BRETON AS A
PAMPHLETEER

NELLIE ELIZABETH MONROE

A THESIS
IN ENGLISH

PRESENTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL IN
PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR
THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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INTRODUCTION

BRETON'S INTEREST TO US

Nicholas Breton, though a little man in an age filled with great names, is interesting today for at least three reasons. He is almost the earliest example we have of a "professional" writer, and must have known all the vicissitudes incident upon this somewhat hazardous existence. His exceptionally long literary career from 1575 to 1626 spans an eventful period in history and literature, and bears the impress of many literary fashions. His connection with the essay is of first importance here. Add to this his great diversity of subject-matter, form, and treatment, and we have an author who challenges our attention across the centuries as even greater men may not. From the distance of three hundred years, we see how a man went about earning a livelihood by his pen, a newspaper man before the newspaper was evolved, and in an age that looked with a degree of scorn upon professionalism. A gentleman in Breton's day would adopt any shift whatsoever to avoid the imputation of living by what he wrote, and although every new ballad or pamphlet was read with avidity, the authors were scorned by all classes of society, and even suspected and discouraged at times by the government.¹ Not only the great, who despised a means they could not adopt, but "professional" writers themselves heaped contempt upon their fellows. Nash in his Preface to *Astrophel and Stella* sneeringly describes Breton as Pan in his bower of delights surrounded by Midases to admire his hornpipe. This criticism was harsh indeed, especially since only three or four of the poems in the book referred to belonged to Breton, and these among the better ones of the collection. Richard Joanes had published the *Bower of Delights* under Breton's name probably to gain an immediate popularity for it, and Breton was justly irritated at the misrepresentation of his literary skill and the stinging criticism which

¹ See Sheavyn, Phoebe, *The Literary Profession in the Elizabethan Age*, 1909.

followed. *Marie Magdalen's Love* for a long time wrongly attributed to Breton was probably printed by Danter along with his poems in order to make it sell.¹ There are other examples of how Breton suffered at the hands of his publishers because of his very great popularity. The number of Breton's publishers shows that he disposed of his manuscripts wherever he could sell to best advantage. Since there were no contracts in those days, a struggling pamphleteer had to depend on his own ingenuity as a bargainer; he was forced to hark his goods up and down, advertise in St. Paul's churchyard or the inns of court, and bicker with various publishers until he had made a sale. We know from many sources that publishers were given to driving hard bargains and many tricks to cheat the writer out of his gains. In the dedicatory letter to the *Works of a Young Wit*,² Breton complains of the difficulty of disposing of his manuscripts, and in various places refers to the futility of trying to please all tastes. In the foreword to the *Strange Fortunes of Two Excellent Princes*, he says that if the reader will but part with a little money, something better may follow. *The Mothers Blessing* complained "that matter of good worth, either morall, or divine, . . . it will not sell almost for any thing." The printer's preface to the *Arbor of Amorous Devices* begs protection against "cavilling Finde faultes, that never like of any thing, but what they doe themselves." All this does not mean that Breton was unappreciated in his own day—he enjoyed a very wide vogue, was praised by Puttenham and Jonson, was fortunate enough to gain the Queen's ear, and was compared to Spenser, Sidney, and even Shakespeare, though of course not with justice.³ His life shows, however, some of the hardships inherent in a profession not yet established and not accepted as honorable. With all the inadequacies of printing and publication and the contemptuous attitude of the public, it seems incredible that Breton should have produced so much. There were still other discouragements. Breton on several occasions deplors the petty jealousies and quarrels common among all classes of writers, especially among the poor scrib-

¹ Nicholson, Brinsley, "The Religion of Nicholas Breton," *Notes and Queries* I, Series V, p. 501.

² See Grosart Memorial-Introduction LXII.

³ Tappan, E., *The Poetry of Nicholson Breton*, 1896.

blers who had to meet an intensive competition with their own kind and with writers of greater merits. In the epistle dedicatory to *No Whipping but a Tripping*, almost certainly Breton's, the author remarks on having seen scurrilous verses tacked up in St. Paul's churchyard for all to see and recording a quarrel among literary men. Why one fool should be angry with another is not clear to Breton. In the same work he expresses the wish that all authors could join in friendship. Breton's modesty and kindness, his titles which indicate the slight value he set on his works, and the airy little prefaces in which he disclaims any pretense to greatness, kept him from being involved in these quarrels, even though he could not escape unfair censure. Perhaps Breton's greatest trial was in not finding a permanent patron. Although early in his career he belonged to the outer circle of the Countess of Pembroke and was on terms of easy familiarity with great authors, he never succeeded in obtaining effective patronage, as the variety of his dedications attests. Twenty-one different names appear among his dedications, and only two of these persons have sponsored more than one work. In spite of this, Breton's dedications are remarkably free from adulation. At a time when patronage was the necessary goal of authors, especially of the poor scribbler who had neither great name nor ability to herald his work, and when flattery was almost universal, he wrote his dedications with a quiet dignity and independence of spirit that speak well of his character. Instead of resorting to extravagant eulogy, Breton appeals to the good judgment of his patrons, and to their love of virtue and learning. The dedication of *Wonders Worth The Hearing* to John Cradocke Cutler is written with unusual frankness: "Scholler I holde you none, but I know you understand English, and can conceipt an honest meaning, better then a braine full of more business." Even the dedication to King James is free from extravagance or flattery.

Breton must have been a pleasant man indeed, modest, yet not unaware of his ability, never subservient to his superiors, nor harsh to those less favored than he. His life brings a picture of the busy pamphleteer, somewhat aloof from his times, going from one publisher to another to dispose of his wares, reading the

advertisements in the churchyard of St. Paul's or mingling with his fellow pamphleteers, deploring the quarrels that separated authors, and always hoping for a patron who would secure him against the shifts of fortune, though never stooping to beg or fawn.

Breton's long literary career from 1575 to 1626 and the diversity of his subject-matter and mode constitute another claim to our attention. He was a boy when Queen Elizabeth came to the throne and lived through King James' reign, writing over a period of fifty-one years or more. Although his life spans a thrilling period, with its daring exploits, tortuous intrigues at court, and romance of living, its discoveries that set the blood singing in the ears, its religious upheavals, and the exultant victory over Spain, he seems not to have been concerned with these things, but to have lived somewhat apart, recording with fidelity the changing literary fashions of the century. He has equal facility with verse and prose. His verse, which constitutes his chief claim to distinction, follows the prevailing modes of the day, religious, complimentary, satirical, and pastoral. His prose is large in bulk and varied in subject-matter. He shares with Greene the honor of producing the greatest number of prose pamphlets in his day. He was interested in collections of sententious wisdom in the manner of Erasmus and Heywood, and Lyly, and contemporary books of aphorisms and letters of advice; he wrote two devout little religious tracts, approached the drama, essay, rogue pamphlet, and books of courtesy in the dialogues, tried his hand, though not very successfully, at realistic and courtly fiction, composed a series of letters to serve as models of epistolary style but more to please his own interest in anecdote, jest, and sparkling comment, and was among the first to experiment with the "character," adapting the style of the "character" to the subject-matter of the essay. His prose works also include an anglers' idyl, pointing forward to Walton's *Compleat Angler*, though with a different twist to the dialogue, several pamphlets of imaginary travels, two satirical tracts, and a character sketch of Queen Elizabeth. Breton excelled in none of these forms—he wrote with great rapidity and was averse to revision—but achieved the distinction of reputable workmanship in nearly all.

His works illustrate the taste of an uncritical Tudor audience, but an audience, it must be remembered, that had admired Spenser, Sidney, Shakespeare, and Jonson. It is no small matter thus to establish contact with the tastes and interests of Jacobean England. His works tap the varied interests of his day. He admired the merchant's public spirit and desire to learn and travel; he observed court life with no small degree of interest, and had a workable knowledge of the professions. Like Greene and Dekker, he was conversant with the vocabulary of low life, exposing the abuses of cozenage and cony-catching and tobacco smoking and drinking. Although generous in his praise of women, he observes their foibles and vanities, their lisping and painting as though to put nature out of countenance, use of false hair and great fardingales, limping as though they walked on egg shells, tobacco breath, and tricks to make fools of men or to pick pockets. His most severe strictures, however, fall upon murmurers, who are not content with a learned king, the blessings of peace, liberty of conscience, and prosperity, or who are envious of the preferment of others and unwilling to work together to the common good. But even deeper than these interests is his interest in nature. Though we know little of the events of Breton's life, we are safe in assuming that he spent much of his time in the country. He is an angler of no mean knowledge. He observes with a kind of loving tenderness the hare washing its face in a furrow, the rabbits running to base in Summer, and the lark leading her young out of the nest in Autumn, when the scythe and sickle cut down the grass. Later on he watches the blackbird stripping the thorn of every berry in the cold days of January, the frog seeking out the paddock and the gardener sorting his seed when February comes, and the fishmonger preparing his wares against Lent. There are bright little pictures of Merrie England too. But the deepest interest of Breton's life was religion. His "divine considerations," and devout little poems and prayers are brimming over with the love of God. Breton is poetically at his best in the pastoral and religious verse; his nature essays and religious tracts make him an essayist in his own right. It is here that he lays aside his mannerisms and breathes into his work a spirit of sweetness and devotion.

BRETON'S LIFE

In spite of diligent search, all but a few bare facts about the life of Nicholas Breton remain matters for conjecture. The Memorial-Introduction to Grosart's complete edition of Breton's work, Miss Eva M. Tappan's thesis on his poetry, and certain legal documents in regard to his mother's later marriage to Gascoigne contain almost all the available information. Since Miss Tappan's thesis, however, the date of Breton's birth has been established with comparative certainty. An Inquisition Post Mortem of William Breton,¹ taken October 27, 1567, shows that the oldest child, Richard, had at that time reached the age of sixteen years, eleven months, and two days. He must, therefore, have been born November 25, 1550, and Nicholas Breton, the second child, not before 1551, instead of 1545 as given by the early biographers. In the absence of evidence to the contrary, we may assume that Breton was born in the "Capitall Mansion house in Redcrostrete," in London, mentioned in his father's will as the family residence.

Breton was descended of an ancient family which traced its lineage as far back as the Conquest. The Bretons were originally settled in Layer-Breton, Essex, but held lands in various counties, and were people of dignity and importance in the community. William Breton, the father, was a younger son who had come up to London and amassed a fortune in trade and had somehow fallen into possession of some of the hereditary lands of the family. He died in 1559 in his Mansion house on Red Cross Street, and his will, in which he describes himself as a gentleman of the "parysshe of saynt Gyles wt out Creplegate of London," yields no small amount of information about the home in which Nicholas Breton grew up.² William Breton belonged to the wealthy citizen class; he was pious and kindly, fond of the shows of life, if the description of his wardrobe and the furnishing of his house count for anything, generous to the poor, and public spirited

¹ For full discussion of this Inquisition and other matters, see: Ward, B. M., "George Gascoigne and His Circle," *The Review of English Studies*, January, 1926; Ambrose, Genevieve, "George Gascoigne," *The Review of English Studies*, April, 1926; Ward, B. M., "The Will of John Bacon," *The Review of English Studies*, October, 1927.

² See Grosart's Memorial-Introduction for reprint of this will.

beyond his age. His will makes liberal provision for his wife, Elizabeth, and for his five children, Richard, Nicholas, Thamar, Anne, and Mary. Nicholas Breton received by this will the two manors of Burgh in Lincoln and Wykes in Essex, forty pounds in money, some silver spoons, "one salte all gilt wt a cover," and "the gilte bedsted and bedde that I lie on in London wt the Tester and curteyns of blewe and yellow sarcenett and all other thapparrell of the same bed," to be held in trust for him until his twenty-fourth birthday. There are generous legacies to the household servants, to two hospitals, "saint Barthilmewes in Smithfield" and Southwark, to the poor of various parishes in London and the country, and to the poor scholars of Cambridge. William Breton even sets aside a sum of money for repairing bridges along the highway and for other public works. The bequests of various articles of clothing to his friends and his two sons are quaint and amusing. To his friend Thomas Sackford of Gray's Inn, he leaves his "beste Gowne of clothe furred wt skywrell and faced wt martens," and his "dublet of crynsen satten." The mention of a retinue of servants, family plate, gilt bedsteads, and rich hangings betokens a home accustomed to wealth and generous living. We can picture a comely and well ordered home-life, where honesty and thrift were practiced in the midst of affluence, and the children nurtured in piety and learning.¹

Breton's mother, Elizabeth Breton, was the daughter of John Bacon and first cousin to Sir Nicholas Bacon, the essayist's father. The dedication of *Characters Upon Essaies* to Sir Francis Bacon may have been made in recognition of this relationship. That Elizabeth Breton was a woman of good sense and intelligence is attested by the fact that she was left the management of her husband's entire estate until her sons should come of age at twenty-two and twenty-four respectively, with only one condition, that she remain "sole," and by the fact that, if her daughters married without her consent, their legacies were to be forfeited. In one respect, this trust seems not to have been deserved, for sometime before 1567, she married the poet and soldier, George

¹ For further details of Breton's life, see: Grosart, Memorial-Introduction, *Works of Breton*, vol. I; Tappan, E. M., *The Poetry of Breton*; Dictionary of National Biography; Bullen, A. H., *Elizabethans*; Schelling, F. E., *George Gascoigne; The Queen's Progress*, "An Elizabethan Will."

Gascoigne. As Gascoigne seems to have influenced Nicholas Breton's literary career, it is important to examine the facts in regard to this marriage. The date of the marriage is still uncertain. The Inquisition Post Mortem of William Breton, taken October 27, 1567, instead of 1568 as originally thought,¹ in behalf of the Breton children against the widow and her new husband, is of particular interest here, because it shows that Elizabeth was at this time the wife of George Gascoigne. Miss Ambrose thinks that the marriage must have taken place November 23, 1559, 1560, or 1561. The published register of Christ Church, Newgate Street, London, bears notice of George Gascoigne's marriage to Elizabeth Breton, November 23, 1562. The marriage could not have taken place then, for in October of 1562, George Gascoigne and his wife brought suit against one Bowes, who it seems was in possession of certain documents regarding William Breton's bequests to his children, or else, as Ward suggests, was a former husband of Elizabeth Breton's.² At least we know that Gascoigne was established at Walthamstow in or before 1566.³ This was plainly a marriage of convenience. Gascoigne was a courtier with expensive habits and perennially in need of money. What better plan to re-establish his fortune than to marry a widow rich in her own right, to say nothing of the estate held in trust for her children? The widow no doubt was attracted by Gascoigne's dash and verve, and his gentlemanly station. But the marriage seems to have met with disapproval on both sides. There is no reason for believing, however, that the suit brought in behalf of William Breton's children was not settled amicably.⁴ We know that on the seventeenth of February, 1569, Queen Elizabeth granted Gascoigne custody of Richard Breton.⁵ It appears that Gascoigne influenced his step-son, Nicholas, to a literary career. Miss Tappan notes marked similarities between Breton's satire and that of the older poet. It is significant too that Breton began to publish in 1575, two years before Gascoigne's death.

¹ Ambrose, G., "George Gascoigne," *The Review of English Studies*, April, 1926.

² See footnote to first page of this discussion.

³ Hazlitt, W. C. *The Complete Poems of George Gascoigne*, I, p. xviii.

⁴ Grosart, A. B., Memorial-Introduction Breton's Works, XX.

⁵ Ward, B. M., "George Gascoigne and His Circle," *Review of English Studies*, January, 1926.

Grosart has called attention to the fact that Breton dates one of his letters in *A Poste with a Packet of Mad Letters* from Gawthorpe, the home of the Gascoignes. With these things in view, it seems probable that Nicholas Breton and his stepfather were on friendly terms. The Gascoignes, on the other hand, may have considered the alliance beneath them. Although it seems fairly clear now that Sir John Gascoigne did not disinherit his son George, his will shows distrust of him and makes no mention of his daughter-in-law Elizabeth. Sir John's widow, Dame Margaret Gascoigne, mentions neither her son nor his wife.¹

Ward attributes this hostility to the notoriety brought upon Elizabeth Breton by an earlier marriage to one Bowes. The evidence he adduces to establish this marriage is as follows: first, that Machyn describes in his diary under the date of September 30, 1562, a fray in Red Cross Street between "Master Gaskyn" and "Master Boyse," "for they dyd both mare [marry] one woman"; secondly, that Sir Nicholas Bacon in his capacity of Lord Keeper issued an order October 1, 1562, forbidding both George Gascoigne and Edward Bowes to visit Elizabeth Breton until it was decided whose wife she was; and thirdly, that John Bacon, Elizabeth Breton's father, who died in April, 1559, mentions his son-in-law, Mr. Boyes, in his will.² This last would mean that sometime between the twelfth of February, 1559, when William Breton died, and April, 1559, when John Bacon died, Elizabeth Breton had married Bowes. Miss Ambrose finds no evidence for the marriage. She reprints a complaint brought by Gascoigne and his wife in October, 1562, against Bowes, who had come into possession, perhaps illegally, of certain documents regarding William Breton's children, and was probably trying to establish a marriage with Elizabeth Breton to serve his own ends. The passage from the Diary of a Resident of London may be interpreted to mean that Gascoigne and Bowes were arranging to marry one woman. Certainly a marriage so soon after her husband's death hardly seems credible from what we know of Elizabeth Breton's character. It must be remem-

¹ Ward, B. M., "George Gascoigne and His Circle," *The Review of English Studies*, January, 1926.

² Ward, B. M., "The Will of John Bacon," *The Review of English Studies*, October, 1927.

bered, however, that speedy marriages were not unusual in those days, and that a betrothal amounted to a legal marriage.

How the marriage with Gascoigne fared does not appear, although in 1572 he set off for the wars in Holland. He died in 1577, leaving what wealth he had and his affection to his "loving wife," and beseeching the Queen's aid in her behalf and their son's.¹ Elizabeth Gascoigne died in 1585.

We learn almost nothing of Nicholas Breton's childhood and education. It would have been interesting indeed had he recorded some of his early memories as John Bunyan later recorded his orchard-stealing and profanity. But Breton is very silent about himself. It is probable that the widow took her children to live at Walthamstow sometime before 1566. Here, if we dare reconstruct from his writing, lying on a sunny bank, Nicholas could watch the marigold opening its leaves in the early morning or listen to the nightingale "tuning its throat against May." He must have learned the fisherman's art very early in life, if we can judge from passages in *Wits Trenchmour*. Bringing in the May and dancing a bout at a country wedding were familiar parts of his experience. In October he could watch the titmouse keeping its abode in the hollow tree or the blackbird sitting close at the bottom of the hedge. He might well have stood by the shepherd's side as he set his pitch on the fire and filled his tar-pot before starting to the fields, or listened to the blind beggars singing and dancing along the hedges, "always with an eye to the constable." When in the city, he may have lain awake to hear the bellman call the hour, or in the early days of October heard the rattle of the coaches on the cobble stones, or enjoyed a game of tennis or balloon ball. He could not have helped loving the Yule-tide cheer of "Merrie England," when the board is piled high, and carols sung, and feats of skill performed. His works, especially the *Court and Country*, *Wits Trenchmour*, and *Fantasticks*, are filled with bright pictures of Tudor England which suggest a personal acquaintance with the manners and customs of country people.

It is probable that Breton went to Oxford as a young man,

¹ Whetstone, George, *A Remembrance of the Wel imployed Life, and godly end, of George Gascoigne Esquire*, 1577.

but, if so, he took no degree. There is the following evidence for his having been a university man. The diary of the Rev. Richard Madox contains an entry under date of 14 March, 1582, which refers almost certainly to Nicholas Breton. He writes that "Mr. Brytten, once of Oriel College, wch made wyts wyl," who speaks Italian well, had been present at a dinner he attended. Although Breton's *Wil of Wit* was not published, as far as we know, until 1597, it was entered to the Stationers' Register under date 7 September, 1580, so that this reference is very probably to him. Secondly, Breton refers to college life rather frequently and in an entirely natural manner. *A Poste with a Packet of Mad Letters* contains several letters of advice to young men at the university or about to go to the university. Letter fourteen of the second series, one of the few letters signed N. B., and written to advise a friend at his lodging in the Temple to continue with his studies, concludes thus: "From my lodging in the little College this tenth of August, 1636." In another letter he gives his advice a good colour by saying: "but for that I have passed the place that you are going to, and have tried the natures of those studies, and the profit to be made of them, let me tell mine opinion of them."

Wits Trenchmour has an amusing dialogue in which a father inquires into the profit his son has derived from his university training and the son gives account of himself. It must be noted, however, that the point of view here and in various other places is that of an outsider, the old man flouting all learning but Divinity and Arithmetic. *An Old Man's Lesson and a Young Man's Love* has a similar sparkling inquisition. In this pamphlet, on the other hand, Breton maintains the accepted collegian's stand that learning is honorable without any regard to utilitarian values. Grimello, in the pamphlet describing his adventures, tells how he has earned the title of honest scholar at the university by never using rhetoric to persuade to wickedness, nor poetry in wantonness. Grimello held knowledge in high esteem, but chiefly because of its moral influence. *A Discourse of a Scholler* and *A Souldiour* shows a sincere love of learning and a knowledge of its value.

"The scholler studies . . . how to keepe the subject at home in order, the countrey in quiet, and himself in wealth: the scholler

seeks by law, to redresse the poore mans wrong: the scholler studies to know all good, and eschew all ill."¹

Although these references reveal some knowledge of university life, they do not establish a long residence. Many of them show a middle class attitude toward learning and the cleavage between gown and townsman, as it must have appeared from the outside. There is further evidence of his having spent at least some time at Oxford. The introduction to one of the poems of *Toys of an Idle Head* implies that the author had spent several years at Oxford. And lastly, the *Pilgrimage to Paradise* is dedicated to the Gentleman students and Scholars at Oxford.

Whether Breton ever attended the university or not, he is in no sense an unlearned man. Corser describes him as a scholar and a gentleman. His works bear the impress of wide but casual reading. He quotes Italian and Latin rather frequently; he very probably knew the Italian pastoralists in the original, and tried his hand at fiction in the Italian manner.² A *Dialogue Full of Pithe and Pleasure* was in part translated out of the Italian. He refers to Dante, Petrarch, Castiglione, Tasso, Ariosto, Guarini, and Machiavelli, though such references are, of course, common property. If the entry in the Rev. Richard Madox' diary refer to Nicholas Breton, then he doubtless spoke Italian with ease. In the dedicatory letter to a *Poste with a Packet of Mad Letters*, Breton implies that he has read books of epistles in Latin, French, Italian, and Spanish. His collection of letters resembles somewhat the *Golden Epistles* of Guevara. His references to classical authors and mythology are rather frequent and natural, as of one who carries his knowledge with ease. There is mention of Homer, Cicero, Virgil, Ovid, Cato, and Marcus Aurelius—no unusual range, it is true. His writing is interwoven with scriptural allusion. Grosart notes a great many references to Shakespeare's plays and C. R. Haines calls attention to a parallel between part of *An Odd Conceit* and Shakespeare's sonnet CV. This does not argue a knowledge of Shakespeare, however, but rather that Shakespeare used the common language of his day as well as the language of the court and of affairs and of passion and romance.

¹ "Grimello's Fortunes," *Works of Breton*, 6/1. See also, "Strange Newes," *ibid.*, 10/1; "Fantasticks," *ibid.*, 5/1.

² *The Historie of two Princes, Fantiro and Penillo.*

Finally, when we consider that Breton's verse shows the influence of Gascoigne, Turberville, Sidney, Spenser, and Drayton, and his prose the influence of Lyly, Greene, Bacon, and other essayists of the period, as well as Italian and Spanish influences, we see that he was widely read, whatever his formal education may have been.

Breton very probably travelled abroad in early manhood. He shows a high regard for travel and a general knowledge of the continent. In the foreword to *Marie's Exercise* he says that, having travelled through various parts of the world and looked upon stately palaces, he has returned to his own country to find the contemplative life sweetest. The son in *An Old Man's Lesson and a Young Man's Love* defends travel with understanding and intelligence, and advises the traveller to note the nature of the soil wherever he visits, the inhabitants of the country, and the wisdom of the governors.

Breton must have spent much of his mature life in London. One of his works is written "from his lodging in the Black Friars," another "from his chamber in Holbourne." He makes frequent reference to familiar London localities—"Holbourne Hill," "Tiburne," St. Paul's Walks, Cheapside, and the like. The register of St. Giles, Cripplegate, London, makes note of the marriage 1592/3, Jan. 14, of Nicholas Brytten and Ann Sutton. If this is the Nicholas Breton of our study—and there seems little reason to doubt it—then the following entries refer to the baptism of his children.

Jan. 25, 1600.	Anne, d. of Nicholas Brytten.
May 14, 1603.	Henry, son of Nicholas Brytten.
March 16, 1605.	Edward, s. of Nicholas Bryttayne, Gent.
May 7, 1607.	Matilda, dau. of Nicholas Bryttaine, Gent.

There are also the following burial notices:

1603, July 15,	a servant of Nicholas Britten, Gent.
1603, Oct. 2,	Mary, dau. of Nicholas Brittainne, Gent.
1605, April 11,	Henry, son Nicholas Britton, (Gent).
1625, July 27,	Matilda, dau. of Nicholas Brittainne, Gent. ¹

¹ For these entries, I am indebted to the Record Keeper of St. Giles Church, London.

Parts of Breton's prose and verse bear the impress of deep personal sorrow and bereavement, and although we must not be tempted into reading too much into the work of a man so habitually reserved as Breton, it is altogether probable that, like the rest of mankind, he suffered from loss of friends and family, and that his charity is not merely innate, but likewise the outcome of a full and varied experience.

Breton's circle of friends was wide. Although to live by one's pen met with a certain degree of scorn in those days, Breton's birth and the influence of Gascoigne, who was popular at court and among literary men, must have stood him in good stead. A man of Breton's modesty and genial temper could not help but attract other men to himself. He must have known Sir Philip Sidney and appears to have belonged to the outer group of the Countess of Pembroke's circle. His dedications are to men and women of quality, including among them that universal patroness of letters, the Countess of Pembroke, Lady Sara Hastings, Robert, Earl of Salisbury, William Herbert, Earl of Pembroke, Sir Francis Bacon, and the Lords of the Privy Council. He is mentioned by many of the most important literary men of his day—George Puttenham, Francis Meres, John Bodenhams, Ben Jonson, Thomas Dekker, Francis Beaumont, and John Fletcher¹—and appears to have been on terms of intimacy with many literary men of note.

Although Breton is almost never autobiographical, an attentive reading of his work and the prefaces to them brings one very close to his character. His sweetness of temper and sincere goodness of heart meet us at every turn. I have mentioned before his independence of spirit. To patron and reader alike he is dignified and courteous, but never subservient; he asks that his book be read and then judged. He craves pardon of none for speaking his mind in praise of women, and solicits good thoughts of them who think him deserving.² A wholesome optimism and good sense pervade his outlook. He meets adverse criticism with a certain urbanity of spirit. He hopes the best will take his work as he meant it; for the rest, "there lyes neither

¹ Tappan, E. M., *The Poetry of Nicholas Breton*, 1898.

² Preface, "The Praise of Vertuous Ladies and Gentlewomen."

life nor death upon a look."¹ In the preface to the *Miseries of Mauillia*, he writes: "It may be, you may think it well done; if not, I wish it better, and you well." He has cold comfort indeed for those who cannot understand "characters." "Characters are not every man's construction though they be writ in our mother tongue: and what I have written, being of no other nature, if they fit not your humour, they may please a better."² A critic taking up *Characters upon Essaies*, would no doubt hesitate to condemn it. And yet no one could be more modest than Breton, who indicates the slight value he set upon his efforts by titles such as *Toyes of An Idle Head* and *A Mad World My Masters*, and by his airy little prefaces, in which he hesitates to "make a long supper of a little meat"; or asks the indulgence of wise men with his folly, or sends forth a "little Tittle" to one who "can away with small birds." Scarcely more than a puff, these prefaces must have disarmed critics and readers alike. Breton never parades his learning nor assumes a magisterial tone in giving advice. His satire reveals no bitterness. He deplores worldliness and the worship of wealth. The wealthy rascal, no matter how base, is honored by cap and knee; ballads are written in his praise, and books dedicated to his patronage. His picture of the bailiff of a fishing-town, whose frown makes half a street afraid and the greatest "codshead gape for feare," has the sharp, clear vision and suavity of the Sir Roger de Coverley papers. Breton must have smiled, too, at those who talk of nothing but "pinning of ruffles," "starching rebatoes," and "outlandish tire." Idleness, ingratitude, cowardice, and disloyalty to the government receive his most severe strictures. His was a cheerful, sunny disposition, informed with a very sincere religious faith and a wise and beautiful tolerance. We are not sure when Breton's voice was silenced, but since his last work was entered to the Stationers' Register in 1626, it is safe to assume that he did not live much beyond that year.

¹ *Ibid.*, 60/2.

² Forward to the reader, "Characters upon Essaies."

BRETON'S LITERARY ACTIVITY

Breton's literary activity extends from 1575 to 1626, his career as prose writer from 1580 to 1626. During a period of forty-six years, he wrote at least twenty-seven prose tracts, all but three of which are entered to the Stationers' Register. This paper is concerned only with Breton's prose tracts, which are arranged according to their entries on the Register with the date of the first extant edition given also.

Breton's earliest prose writing is the *Wil of Wit*, a miscellany or hotch-potch of small tracts of various types—two allegories, a dialogue between a scholar and soldier, a realistic story, a paper in praise of virtuous women, and an allegorical dialogue. It was first entered to the Register on 7 May, 1580, and again 20 October, 1596. The first known edition came in 1599.¹ It seems hardly credible that Breton should have waited so long for publication, after the trouble of having the book registered, so that the first edition has no doubt been lost. There are six separate tracts in this volume, most of them revealing prentice work, given to undue word play and thin in substance, but noteworthy for the diversity of subject-matter and form. The *Discourse Betwixt Wit and Will* and the *Authors Dreame of Strange Effects* are both allegorical in nature, a far-off echo of mediaeval allegory with more attention to the play on words than the underlying thought. *The Scholler and Souldiour* is a dialogue of no small merit, beginning with a little essay passage on the vanity of the world, and then debating the respective merits of scholarship and soldiering. Scholarship is to be esteemed because of its fruit, because it helps maintain quiet, tries to redress the poor man's wrong, and seeks to know all good and eschew ill; the soldiour because he learns to endure hardship, follow glory, and protect his country. The *Miseries of Mauillia* is Breton's earliest venture into fiction, an attempt to tell a story in the realistic fashion to be made popular later by Greene and his followers. Breton is not at home in scenes from low life. His heroine is in no way convincing, and the other characters are villains rather than rogues; there is little connection between the events of the story, and none of the verve and

¹ Pollard and Redgrave mention an edition of 1597 of which I can find no record.

spirit belonging to a picaresque yarn. The *Praise of Vertuous Ladies and Gentlewomen* is a logical and balanced defence of women in strong contrast to many of the invectives and satires of the day. Women have their faults, but so have men, and where she falls short of him in one quality, she surpasses him in another. Thus at the very beginning of his career Breton showed a diversity of interests and variety of ability not always present in great writers. The popularity of this first work is attested by the fact that in 1606 an edition "newly corrected being the fift time imprinted" appeared.

(2) *Auspicante Jehova. Maries Exercise*, Breton's second work to appear on the Register, was entered 30 December, 1595. The first edition printed at London by Thomas Este appeared in 1597. This is a series of little prayers based on certain Biblical passages, remarkable for the revelation of a devout and sincere spirit, and for the beauty of thought and imagery. It is dedicated to the Countess of Pembroke. Since Breton's verse is rather largely religious, and this work came early in his career, it is probable that he was led into prose writing through his religious interest.

(3) The first edition of *Wits Trenchmour* came in 1597. This is a fisherman's idyl, stuffed with quaint, out of the way knowledge and fantastic humor, and dedicated to William, Earl of Pembroke, one of the patrons of the first folio of Shakespeare, and son to the Countess of Pembroke. In this sparkling dialogue, a scholar comes upon a fisherman holding out his arm over the water, and thinks him Narcissus in love with his own reflection; a merry conversation follows, which turns first on fishing and the habits of the various fish, then upon a display of learning through crossing of proverbs; then the scholar tells a story of an old cony-catcher and his son, and the angler responds with a story, in Italian fashion, of the court of the Duke of Calliflorida. The style of the dialogue is particularly bright and vivid—it resembles the familiar essay in its whimsicality, and occasional subjective note—and is interesting because of the wealth of anecdote and quaint turns of thought.

(4) The *Figure of Foure* was first entered 10 October, 1597, and again 19 November, 1607; the second part was published

first in 1623,¹ again in 1636 and 1654. Only the second part survives. Loundes and Graesse² mention the *Figure of Three, Foure, Five, Sixe, and Seven, by N. Breton and others, 1626*, but the exemplar of this book seems to have been lost. The *Figure of Foure* is a curious little book in which ideas are arranged in sets of four, a device very probably taken from the Spanish humanist, Guevara. This book is important in relation to the essay of the period. It was to collections such as this and books of precepts and examples that the seventeenth century essayist turned for subject matter. An enumeration like the following—"there are foure great trials of wit; to chuse a friend and keepe him, to conceale adversity with patience, to bee thrifty without covetousness, and to live out of the feare of the Law"—might have served as great a man as Bacon for the basis of an essay.

(5) *The Strange Fortunes of Two Excellent Princes: In Their lives and loves, to their equale Ladies in all the titles of true honour* was entered 15 April, 1600, and imprinted at London by P. Short, for Nicholas Ling in the same year. This is a court romance after the manner of Greene and with far-off echoes of Euphuism in its pages. Breton influenced by Greene, from whom he borrowed the dialogue form, the rogue pamphlet, and the habit of writing imaginary letters, and by the Italian court romance, spins a story of complicated adventure and love making, full of improbability in the way characters are moved about, but with none of the beautiful unreality of setting to be found in many of Greene's romances.

(6) *A Poste With A Packet Of Mad Letters* was entered 18 May, 1602. This is a letter book with the rules and discussion omitted. It is full of bright anecdotes and jests, and illumined now and then by apt and beautiful similitudes. Breton is more interested in vivid pictures and sparkling comment than in writing models for correct correspondence. There are love letters, news letters, business letters, letters of condolence, recommendation, advice, compliment, and gossip. This is the first series of familiar letters in English.

¹ Pollard and Redgrave give 1623 as the first edition, other bibliographers 1636.

² Loundes, W., *Bibliographers' Manual of English Literature*; Graesse, J., *Trésor De Livres Rares Et Precieux*.

(7) A dialogue full of pithe and pleasure: between three *Philosophers: Antonio, Meandro, and Dinarco: Upon the Dignitie, Or Indignitie of Man. Partly Translated out of Italian, and partly set downe by way of observation* was entered 30 September, 1602, and first published in 1603. In the dedication of this book to John Linewray, Esquier, Maister Surveior Generall of all her Maiesties Ordnance, Breton makes the following acknowledgment: "The greatest part of this booke was in Italian, dedicated to a man of much esteeme, in the Dukedom of Florence, and this booke in this our language, I have thought good here in England, to present to your worthinesse of a better worke, in this her Maiesties Royal Tower of London: in which, as by your continuall travels in your place, you doubtlesse deserve no lesse gracious regarde of the greatest, then account with the wisest."

There is warm and sincere praise of the queen in this book and a noble defence of man. Three friends meet and fall into a discussion, Antonio and Dinarco putting man lower than the animals, Meandro asserting that he approaches God in his care of the oppressed, and magnanimity of spirit. If poor, he may rise above his estate in virtue; if strong and powerful he may show the grace of pity and mercy.

(8) The next pamphlet, *A Merrie Dialogue Betwixt the Taker And Mistaker*. imprinted at London, for James Shaw, and are to be sold at his shop neare Lud-Gate. 1603, was entered 27 October, 1602. A later edition in 1635 bears the title: *A Mad World My Masters, Mistake me not. Or a merry Dialogue betweene two Travelers, The Taker, and Mistaker: Being very Delightfull, Pleasant, and Profitable to all*. This work consists of a dialogue between two friends, Dorindo and Lorenzo, who meet after a long separation and talk over their adventures in foreign countries, Dorindo telling of his mistakes and disillusionments, and Lorenzo of his taking up various professions without finding his niche in any of them. The style is vivid and sparkling.

(9) A similar dialogue, *Wonders Worth the Hearing*, was entered 20 November, 1602. The title page of the first edition describes the purpose of the dialogue: *Wonders Worth The Hearing which being read or heard in a Winters evening, by a good fire, or a Summers morning, in the greene fields: may serve both to purge melancholy*

from the minde, & grosse humours from the body. Pleasant for youth, recreative for age, profitable for all, and not hurtful to any. London. Printed for John Tappe, and are to be solde at his shop on Tower hill neare the Bulwarke gate. 1602. In the foreword to the reader, Breton says: "I wonder with what tytle to fit you, gentle, wise, or fonde and scoffing Reader, but in the hope of the best, I will begin, with: Gentle Reader, let me intreate you not to wonder at me for writing of Wonders. . . . I have thought good, to those good people, to commit the perusing of this little wonderfull piece of worke: wherein, if they finde nothing that may please them, I shall wonder at my wit: if any doth like them, I shall wonder what it is, and thinke the better of it when I know it." This is a dialogue between Francisco and Lorillo, beginning in a vein of delightful pleasantry and ending with little pictures of low life in the manner of Greene's cony-catchers. The first part closes with the serene little thought that, since God is in all things, nothing need be wondered at.

(10) The rather mediocre pamphlet, *I Pray you be not Angrie. A Pleasant and merry Dialogue, betweene two Travellers as they met on the Highway*. By N. B. At London, Printed by W. W. for William Jones, dwelling at the signe of the Gunne neare Holbourne Conduit. 1605, was entered to the Stationers' Register, 21 March, 1604. There were two later editions of this work, 1624 and 1632. In the dialogue between Fabiano and Fernuno, a number of trying situations are postulated and patience recommended in every case. Some of the anecdotes savour of the literature of low life made popular by Greene and Dekker.

(11) On 7 November, 1604, a sparkling little dialogue between a father and his son was entered to the Stationers' Register, and in 1605 the first edition appeared: *An Olde Mans Lesson, and A Young Mans Love*. By Nicholas Breton. London. Imprinted for Edward White, and are to bee solde at his Shop and neare the little Northe doore of S. Paules Church at the Signe of the Gun. 1605. There is a charming play of wit over this dialogue; the son offers a brave defence of the university and of travel, and the father's praise of things English sounds the authentic notes of the familiar essay.

(12) Another dialogue, *Grimellos Fortunes With his Entertainment in his travaile. A discourse full of pleasure.* London. Printed for E. White and are to bee solde at his Shoppe neare the little Northe doore of S. Paules Church at the Sign of the Gun. 1604, was not entered to the Stationers' Register. This is another dialogue of imaginary adventures. Grimello, having earned the title honest scholar at the University, tries his fortune in the ministry, at court, in war, law, and farming, only to find himself a failure in all these courses, because he refuses to flatter, bow to the great, cheat his neighbor, or wrest money from the poor.

(13) *Wits Private Wealth*, a collection of proverbial sayings, was entered 16 January, 1606, printed in 1612, and reprinted five times up to 1639. Breton's mind was stored with moral maxims and proverbs, and in common with many of his contemporaries, he collected them as a means of teaching morality. *Crossing of Proverbs*, entered to the Stationers' Register, 20 July, 1616, and the *Figure of Foure*, mentioned earlier, are similar works. Collections such as these offered a rich fund of material to the essayist.

(14) The political tract, a *Murmurer*, directed against those who are not content with the blessings of a quiet reign, and wise king, and enlightened religion, was entered 6 March, 1607. The first edition came also in 1607. This tract is written with vigor, though with no bitterness, and shows a mind sensible of the benefits about it, and unwilling to complain or hear others complain of what cannot be remedied. There is very little of the futile punning or small sword play with ideas that mar so many of his pamphlets. The sentences often rise to an effective climax, and the thought is packed tight rather than elaborated on and embroidered with rhetorical device. The following is an example of the succinct style and of the relation of this tract to books of precepts: "If thou be a king, keepe thy feare; If a Courtier, know thy place; if a Scholler plie thy booke; if a Souldier, look to thine honor; if a merchant, take thy fortune; if a farmer follow thy plough; if a beggar, fal to prayer."

(15) Breton's second religious tract, his *Divine considerations of the Soule. Concerning the excellencie of God, and the vileness of man. Verie necessarie and profitable for everie true Christian*,

seriously to looke into. By N. B. G. London. Printed by E. A. for John Tappe and are to be solde at his shop on the Tower-Hill, neer the Bulwarke Gate. 1608, was entered to the Stationers' Register 3 November, 1607. *Divine Considerations* is a meditation, with less intimacy than is usual with this form, but in no way concerned with dogma or ecclesiasticism. Breton first meditates on the goodness, mercy, and glory of God and then on the failings of man.

(16) Breton next ventured into character study and essay, combining the two forms in *Characters Upon Essaies Morall, and Divine, Written for those good Spirits, that will take them in good part, And make use of them to good purpose.* London: Printed by Edw. Griffin for John Gwillum, and are to be solde at his shop in Britaines-Burse. 1615. These characters are interesting because they show the close relationship between character and essay, and point to the later fusion of the two forms, and because of the dedication to Sir Francis Bacon. The book was entered to the Stationers' Register 4 May, 1615.

(17) On 29 October, 1615, another set of characters was entered—the *Good and the Badde, Or Descriptions of the Worthies, and Unworthies of Their Age. Where the Best may see their Graces, and the worst discern their Basenesse.* This is a series of fifty "characters," arranged in pairs and according to rank in society. The style shows the influence of Bacon in the short, pithy sentences, or in the long sentences which give the impression of brevity because of the parallel and balanced structure, and of the Euphuists in the use of alliteration and antithesis.

(18) *Crossing of proverbs: crosse-answers a. crosse-humours.* by B. N. gent., was entered to the Stationers' Register, 20 July, 1616, the first edition coming in the same year. On 9 August, 1616, the first and second part of *Crossing the proverbs.* by B. N. was entered. This work consists of a collection of proverbial sayings with witty denials of their truth, followed by a series of questions and answers somewhat in the manner of a guessing contest. Breton must have been well versed in proverb lore, and no doubt pored over the collections of his day, and of the preceding centuries with a great deal of assiduity, jotting down a proverb here that might enliven one of his essays, giving a

slight twist to another, and occasionally creating maxims of his own. Breton shows a knowledge of both English and foreign proverbs—some of his sayings go back to early English; he certainly knew and used Heywood's collections—not only proverbs but devices are common to the two authors—and, like his contemporaries, he knew the *Adagia* of Erasmus, quoting from it directly sometimes, and again using the phrases that had become the common stock of Elizabethan writers. I have made lists of proverbs which show his dependence on Erasmus and Heywood, which need not be included here. Breton crosses proverbs in exactly the same way that Heywood writes a little epigram on a proverb, rather often using the same statement as a basis for his device. Other tracts of Breton which have a goodly sprinkling of proverbs are: *Wits Trenchmour*, *Strange Newes*, *I Pray You Be Not Angry*, *Dialogue Full of Piſhe and Pleasure*, *An Olde Mans Lesson*, and the two books of "characters."

(19) On the 7 January, 1617, the *Court and Country* was entered, and printed in 1618. This is an attractive dialogue with vivid descriptions of games and sports and country festivals, and a keen zest for life in the country. The country-man contrasts the serene pleasures of his life with the artificiality of the court; he believes in honesty, thrift, and hard work, and challenges our admiration in his study independence and dignity. It is probable that this dialogue was suggested to Breton by Greene's *Dispute Between Velvet Breeches and Cloth Breeches*, 1592, which has the same sturdy admiration of simple pleasures as Breton displays.

(20) *Strange Newes*, a rather commonplace account of fictitious places, was entered to the Stationers' Register, 13 April, 1622. Besides fantastical descriptions and enumerations of strange laws governing these countries, there are passages which give the tricks of rogues and their canting dialect, much in the fashion of Greene's rogue pamphlets. Although Breton had not Greene's intimate acquaintance with the underworld, he describes the characteristics of typical rogues with a degree of vigor.

(21) The last entry in the Stationers Register is *Fantasticks*, 16 January, 1626. These little "descants of the Quarters, moneths, and houres of the yeere," are informed with a radiant freshness and a true insight into country life. Although many

of Breton's pamphlets approach the essay, these little papers give him the honor of being a familiar essayist of no small ability. The details are vivid, the imagery beautiful, and the style almost without affectation.

(22) *The Character of Queen Elizabeth*, printed by Grosart from the British Museum Ms. Harl. 6207, contains a sketch of the life and character of the queen and a very sincere tribute to her memory, and a brief encomium upon her successor. It is dedicated to the Right Honorable Robert, Earl of Salisbury, Lord High Treasurer of England. The book is distinguished by the moderation and sincerity of its praise. These twenty-seven tracts, counting the six parts of the *Wil of Wit* as separate works, bear testimony to Breton's industry and ability with prose. All but three of these works: *Wits Trenchmour*, (1597), *Grimellos Fortunes*, (1604), and the *Character of Queen Elizabeth*, are entered to the Stationers' Register. There are also two prose tracts attributed to Breton, but not surely his, which must be mentioned. *The Case is Altered How? Aske Dalio and Millio, 1604*, and *Choice, Chance and Change: Or, Conceites in their Colours*: imprinted at London for Nathaniell Fosbrooke, and are to be sold at his shop in Pauls Churchyard at the sign of the Helmet. 1606. *The Case is Altered*, entered to the Stationers' Register 16 February, 1603, has been assigned by Collier to Francis Thynne because of the initials F. T. following the address to the reader, but rejected by later authorities as wholly unlike Thynne in style. Corser attributes it without hesitation to Breton on the basis of its style and subject matter. *The Case is Altered* is a dialogue between two neighbours who meet and propose certain lamentable cases and wag their heads over them much in the manner of the Taker and Mistaker in a *Mad World*. The address to the reader has Breton's long, loose sentences and play with words, and his becoming modesty: "the matters handled, are of no great moment, and therefore scarce worth the reading. . . . In brief, I only write upon Cases, neither knife-Cases, Pinne Cases, nor Candle-Cases, but onely a few merry pittiful Cases: In which if I have lost time, I am sorry for my labour; If I have lost my labour, I am sorry for my time, but if I have gained your good will, all is not lost. . . ." The dialogue itself is coarser in tone than Breton's,

who is not entirely at home in scenes from low life. It is probable that Breton was not concerned with making his characters real, but visited them with a fantastic quality in keeping with the nature of the dialogue. There is very little internal evidence for assigning the *Case is Altered* to Breton, and no external evidence whatsoever.

Choice, Chance and Change bears a very marked likeness to Breton's work. It is a dialogue between two friends, Arnofilo and Tidero, who meet on the highway and discuss their travels, much as Grimello overtakes Signior Ganuzido in his travels, or as Fabiano and Fernuno meet in *I Pray You Be Not Angry*. Moreover, the dialogue is concerned with travel in foreign countries which are English in everything but name. *I Pray You Be Not Angry*, *Grimellos Fortunes*, and *A Mad World* tell of similar travels. The dialogue has the sparkle and insouciance of Breton's wit, the same ability with vivid little pictures and bright anecdotes, and the same intimate knowledge of country sports, pastimes, and festivities. The conversation is carried on in a mood of merry waggery, much as Breton's travellers beguile the time with seemingly endless nonsense. There are more detailed likenesses too. The address to the reader in *Choice, Chance and Change*, has Breton's facility, his long, loose sentences that run on until they are out of breath, his cheerful, sunny spirit, and good sense:

"In som, there is nothing so good but may be mended, nor so ill but may bee well taken: kind fellowes and honest wenches I know will not be angry . . . and so hoping that good conceites, will chuse the best and leave the worst, I will change kind thanks for kind acceptance, and so rest, as I find cause."

Tidero enumerates a set of laws in use in a fantastical country he has visited which are very similar to the laws governing a fictitious country in *Strange Newes*. The fisherman in *Choice, Chance and Change*, who discourses of his angle, line, and work, his craft in drawing the bait along the stream, and his playing with the fish when he has him, might have stepped out of *Wits Trenchmour*. A fellow pamphleteer might have borrowed the rather outstanding devices of Breton's style and his stock characters, but it is doubtful whether another pamphleteer would show

such a marked similarity of spirit and manner. The shepherd who can talk of naught but his "Rammes and his Weather, of his Ewes and his Lambs, his hogs and his sheerling: the big bone and fine wooll, the deep side, and the broad loines: the nature of their breed, and of their feed, their wasting, their shearing, their marking, their folding, their diseases and their medicines" is near akin to the shepherds in *Fantasticks* and elsewhere in Breton. *Choice, Chance and Change* has likewise a description of a country wedding that might pass as an integral part of various Breton pamphlets. During the festivities the wedding guests play a game, "decorums and absurdums," which is much like the crossing of proverbs. At supper, there is talk of "despights" which remind one of the proposals in *I Pray You Be Not Angry*, and at breakfast one propounds and another answers much in the manner of Breton's play with ideas. *Choice, Chance and Change* shows the same scorn of deceit and shams to be found everywhere in Breton. Certainly on the basis of internal evidence the tract can be assigned to Breton, although there is no external evidence to substantiate his authorship.

CLASSIFICATION OF BRETON'S PROSE

Breton's versatility and literary instinct for the fashion of the moment are truly remarkable. The twenty-seven prose tracts of undisputed authorship, varied in style and content, represent ten different types of prose writing in vogue throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries: the dialogue, allegory, devotional tract, satire, gnomic pieces, ventures into courtly and realistic fiction, the familiar letter written with a conscious literary purpose, the political tract, the "character," and the essay. The types are not always mutually exclusive; satire as a mode is common to almost all of Breton's work, and the allegorical tendency is frequent. These pamphlets are the work of a popularizer. Breton follows the mode with an unerring instinct for what will appeal to his audience and for the right moment to tap this appeal, yet maintaining a certain independence withal. Miss Tappan has noted that he was never the first to adopt a new fashion, preferring to wait until its first popularity was over before making it his own. Breton's first book of "characters"

was not published until seven years after Hall had broken ground with his *Characters of Vertues and Vices*, but the new book prognosticated the future of the "character" by combining it with the essay. His experiments with Euphuism and court romance came some twenty-two years after the fashion had been set by Lyly, and eight years after the death of Greene, who was Breton's model in this type of fiction. Breton is not a sensationalist ready to seize upon every new fad. He waits for the fruit to mature, but never until it is over-ripe. Or, to change the figure, he knows how to catch the wave on its crest. The dialogue was very popular in his day. It was in common use throughout the Middle Ages, and enjoyed a wide vogue in the first decade of the fifteenth century, especially as a tool in the Lollard movement, and in the controversial literature of the sixteenth century.¹ Ascham's *Toxophilus*, important alike to archery and culture, is written in the dialogue form. The dialogue is particularly important in the development of the essay. The Elizabethans used it as a convenient form for satire, instruction, controversy, comment, drama in the making, and mere chit-chat. It is significant too that Greene, who was Breton's model in fiction, uses the dialogue form, and that a *Quip for an upstart courtier, or a quaint dispute between velvet breeches and cloth breeches* probably suggested to Breton the idea of *Court and Country*. It follows then that the bulk of Breton's work, beginning in 1597 and ending in 1618, is thrown into this form. These dialogues, eleven in number, display a great variety of mood and subject. *Wits Trenchmour* is a little idyl on the joys of fishing, written in a quaint, fantastic manner, and full of proverbs and apothegms, queer turns of thought, and bright anecdotes. *The Discourse Betwixt Wit and Will* and a *Dialogue Between Anger and Patience* are allegories. *The Authors Dreame of Strange Effects* (not in dialogue form) is also allegorical. Breton's allegory is a weakened remnant of mediaevalism; the play on words has become more important than the idea, and the satire is very mild indeed. *A Mad World, I Pray You Be Not Angry*, *Grimellos Fortunes*, and *Wonders Worth The Hearing* are concerned with imaginary travels. *The*

¹ See Hanford, J. H., "The Debate Element In Elizabethan Drama," *Kittredge Anniversary Papers*.

Scholler and The Souldiour, as the title suggests, debates the merits of two professions, the *Courtier* and *The Country-Man*, the merits of town and country life, an *Olde Mans Lesson* And *A Young Mans Love* the value of university life and travel abroad, and a *Dialogue Full of Pieth And Pleasure* the greatness and littleness of man. Most of these dialogues are mildly satirical; others are written with a conscious literary purpose, and still others with no weightier aim than to beguile the hours of a sunny afternoon. Breton's first religious tract came in 1597. Since the mass of his verse is religious, and since the earliest prose, including many of the dialogues, shows a similar bent, it is probable that he was led into the writing of prose through his sincere religious faith and through the general Tudor interest in moral and religious subjects. In response to the quickened religious feeling of the day, he turned his faith into devout little prayers that are touched with the beauty of holiness and divine considerations, discussions rather tedious to us of the value of collectedness in general, the goodness of God, and the sinfulness of man. Here again it was not his task to break ground. He had before him the example of the writings of Tyndale, Crammer, Latimer, Lever, and others in the sixteenth century; the King James version of the Bible, the works of Bishop Andrews, John Donne, Richard Hooker, and John Calvin, and the devotional and controversial pamphlets of men like Richard Brathwait, Thomas Nash, Thomas Dekker, Joseph Hall, Thomas Stapleton, and Robert Parsons. Breton's religious tracts are not closely akin to the work of any of these men, however. The meditation is to be distinguished from the prose of exposition or comment or controversy by its personal note—it is an intimate expression of the author's religious life and not a statement or explanation of his beliefs. He avoids theology and controversy, has no interest in ecclesiastical forms, is not moved by the fervency of Dekker, not caught up into great passions and lifted to the ecstatic heights of great preachers like John Donne. Although his point of view on moral questions was Puritan, he seems to have been a loyal adherent to the Church of England. His simple, luminous prayers must have reached the hearts of the common folk of Tudor England who were not actively concerned with theology and con-

troversy, but to whom the consolations of religion were vital indeed.

Experiments in fiction were likewise common. The names of Lyly and Sidney may dwarf the others, but Greene, Lodge, Nash, and Dekker have still a place, and Breton and Ford, who imitated Greene, are not without their humbler merits. Breton's response to the Tudor interest in strange, unreal adventures and tales from low life is characteristic. *Strange Fortunes* is a loose jointed court romance, piling improbability upon improbability, but rather independent in its use of Euphuism; the *Miseries of Mauillia* attempts to characterize soldiers, peasants, rogues, and unfortunate gentlefolk in realistic fashion. *A Poste with a Packet of Mad Letters* is a reversion to the old formularies with the rules and discussion left out and a reflection of the Renaissance enthusiasm for this form. The Elizabethans derived an interest in letter writing from the Middle Ages, when the art was carefully codified and its principles set with a degree of rigidity, and more immediately from contemporary humanists, especially the Italians, who made collections of letters and wrote many treatises on the art of letter writing. The style and content of a *Mad Packet* were probably inspired by Quevara's *Epistolas Familiares*, published in England many times between 1575 and 1584. In the dedication of *A Poste with a Packet of Mad Letters*, Breton lays claim to a knowledge of collections of letters in Latin, French, Italian, and Spanish. He had likewise before him Elizabethan treatises on rhetoric, such as Wilson's *Arte of Rhetoric*, 1553, and complete letter-writers, such as Angel Day's *English Secreterie*, 1586, modeled on the treatise by Erasmus, and Fulwood's *Enimee of Idlenesse*, translated out of the Italian in 1586. Breton appears to have been the first in this period to write familiar letters with a conscious literary purpose. Hall goes a step further, writing his letters to actual personages, but with a larger audience in mind. In the proverb, Breton had the example of Erasmus and Heywood and a host of his contemporaries who felt that moral maxims and other pieces of sententious wisdom could have a direct influence in forming character. *Wits Private Wealth*, gathered "to content the mind," and the *Crossing of Proverbs* in which proverbs are stated and their truth denied much in the

manner of Heywood, are Breton's two chief contributions to this type of literature, although practically all of his pamphlets are stored with proverbs and maxims. The *Figure of Foure* consists of enumerations of four things very hurtful to the stomach, four sundry kinds of love, four notes of an excellent wit, and the like, a device very probably borrowed from the Spanish humanist, Quevara. A *Murmurer* and the *Character of Queen Elizabeth* may be classed as political tracts. The *Praise of Vertuous Ladies and Gentlewomen*, 1597, and *Strange Newes*, 1622, concerned with imaginary travels, parts of various other pamphlets, and the two books of characters are satirical in nature. Breton's satire is mild and almost genial at times; he has none of the vigor and originality of Donne, nor the bitterness of Hall and Marston, whose satires in verse are based more or less strictly on classical models. Breton followed Gascoigne in his verse satire, and in his prose the informal satire of the pamphleteers of the day who were interested in vivid pictures and racy dialogue as well as in moral and social problems. Awdeley, Harman, Greene, Dekker, and Rowlands had given a tremendous vogue to the literature of roguery before Breton tried his hand at this kind of satire. The *Praise of Vertuous Ladies*, 1597, reads like an answer to pamphlets such as Gosson's *Pleasant Quips for Upstart New-Fangled Gentlewomen*, 1595, in which the lash is applied to women's vanities. Another prevalent form of satire in the seventeenth century was the "character" in which man's deviation from the norm set by religion and society is drawn and his eccentricities set forth with vigor and a display of wit. Breton follows close on the heels of Hall and Overbury with his attempt to fuse the character and essay into one form. In the dedication of *Characters Upon Essaies* he acknowledges his indebtedness to Bacon, affirms that the other character writers were but limping after Bacon's art, and implies that even then the character of an essay, an attempt to adapt the concrete method of the "character" to the subject-matter of the essay, was a recognized variation of the two forms. This book was published eighteen years after the first edition of Bacon's essay and seven years after the first series of English "characters," and was followed the next year by the *Good And The Badde*, in which pairs of "characters" are arranged according to

rank in society. Breton's chief interest to us, however, is as an essayist. Although *Characters upon Essaies* is the only one of his tracts which uses the term essay, all of his work, except the two novels in small, bears a close resemblance to the genre. The dialogue and discourse were the direct forbears of the essay, political, religious, and social discussion was a fostering influence, and the familiar letter, even in ancient times, had the intimate, subjective mood and the brief, tentative quality of the personal essay. The letters of Cicero, Seneca, and Pliny the Younger are really essays in letter form. It is interesting to note too that the style of Breton's letters is much the same as that of his essays. Proverbs and maxims were everywhere expanded into essays following the example of Bacon, and the great encyclopaedic collections of proverbs out of antiquity were a fruitful source of essay topic. The "character" was very early associated with the essay; most of the early character-writers were also essayists; the two terms were frequently confused, and the attempt to combine the two forms led at last to a complete absorption of the "character" in the essay or novel. If Breton was working toward the essay in all these forms, he became an essayist in his own right in *Fantasticks*, a series of little nature essays with a radiant light over them.

DISCUSSION OF BRETON'S WORKS

THE DIALOGUES

It is not surprising that the major part of Breton's prose was thrown into dialogue form. He had the immediate example of many dialogues before him, especially those of Greene, who was also his model in fiction and rogue pamphlets, and the form itself was in long established usage. The dialogue gives ample scope to the leisurely quality of Breton's mind, his fondness for word play, proverbs, and sparkling repartee, and his tendency toward diffuse moralizing. This work is of interest to us chiefly because of its relation to other forms of seventeenth century prose and because of the bright pictures of Tudor life and manners it affords. It was during this century that the first delicate shoots of the light essay pushed their way through the soil. Men were becoming interested in the processes of their own minds, and were writ-

ing out their thoughts in brief, tentative style that was to foster the personal essay. To turn the eye inward and explore a world well nigh forgotten must have been pleasant indeed after the brilliant sunlight and glaring contrasts of the Elizabethan age. The familiar essay, to be distinguished from the formal essay by its inwardness, the informality of its manners and design, and its entire lack of pretension, arose from this habit of mind. Breton was at home here. The discursiveness of his dialogues, the habit of mild irony, the pleasure in quaintness and absurd nothings, and the little pictures etched out of the country-side are all a part of the familiar essay. As Montaigne turned to the classics to correct his judgment of the modern world and to reconcile himself to it, Breton found refuge behind a mask of light raillery, where he could mock the world into sanity and poise, or in his sincere religious faith which showed him the vanity of man's desires and ambitions. The scholar's soliloquy on the futility of all things is a good essay topic.¹ Beauty and riches and honor are nothing because they are not durable; virtue, though beautiful in its effects, is nothing because men will not give money for it; friendship and love are without faith and therefore nothing; and time, though ruling all things, is nothing because it cannot be touched or seen. Breton needed only a more subjective turn of mind and less of the moral bias to have been the first English essayist. The resemblance between his dialogues and the essay goes beyond general features: there are passages that might stand in the pages of almost any light essay. The praise of English fruits in the *Discourse Of A Scholler And A Souldiour* looks forward to Sir William Temple's essay on gardens. The soldier calls to mind nutmegs, cloves, cinnamon, ginger, mace, pepper, oranges, lemons, pound citrons, pomegranates, grapes, sugar in canes, melons, apricots, artichokes, prunes, and raisins, and then asks:

"Is not the cinamon tree to be esteemed above ye apple tree? is not the damson tree to be accounted off above the blackthorn tree? . . . The abricock, above the common plum? and the cherrie above hauthorne berrie. Yes out of doubt, according to the sweetnesse of the taste, is the fruit to be beloved."

¹ "The Scholler And The Souldiour," p. 28.

In an *Olde Mans Lesson And A Young Mans Love*, Chremes praises the English cherry, strawberry, raspberry, and gooseberry, the apple tree, plum, pear, and apricot, and the walnut, filbert, hazel nut, and chestnut in true light essay vein. In a *Mad World My Masters* Dorindo falls into a rapture of praise over the joys of home, when on a fair morning or sunny evening the lambs and rabbits run at base, the birds call from the thickets, and the buds burst their jackets. There is a little rhapsody on the beauty of the nightingale's song in a *Discourse Of A Scholler And A Souldiour* which ends thus: "But when she sings out in the midst of May, about midnight, the weather faire, and she in a fine bush: oh 'tis a heavenly noise, to heare the sweete wretch."

Then there are passages in the dialogues and elsewhere in Breton that resemble the precepts of the books of courtesy, still popular in the seventeenth century. The English ideal of a gentleman, borrowed from Castiglione's *Il Cortegiano* and other Italian courtesy books, was slowly being modified to fit the changed moral and social conditions of the seventeenth century, and a new ideal, which was eventually to include the merchant and professional man as well as the courtier, and which stressed moral and utilitarian values in education, was being erected. Men like Brathwaite, Peacham, and Breton had a share in adapting the books of courtesy to this new point of view. Breton's ideas are frankly middle-class. The *Courtier and The Country-Man* shows a marked distrust of court life, and holds up against its glitter and insecurity the serene pleasures and wholesome work of country living. The country man prefers modest pleasures to lavish expense.

"I feare the place you live in is more costly then profitable; where, for one that goes up the weather a number goe downe the winde, and perhaps the place not so full of delight as the passage through a meaner compasse."

He believes in the dignity of work, is content to know how to plough and harrow, sow and reap: to revere learning in the schoolmaster, parson, and judge; to listen to the sermon on Sunday; and leave book learning to those who have need of it. Breton also shows a hearty regard for the merchant whose desire to travel

abroad, public spirit, and alert, observant mind make him a man of note. In a *Poste With A Packet Of Mad Letters*, he advises a young man about to enter the University to study all the arts superficially, but to apply himself to arithmetic as the assured way to wealth. In another letter a father admonishes his son to be diligent at his studies, since the cost of maintaining him at the University is very great, warns him against lewd company, and to beware of women. In *Wits Trenchmour* a father questions his son as to what he has learned at the Academy and puts down all his attainments, except Divinity and Arithmetic, as useless. He closes with a diatribe against aping courtly manners:

"What, quoth the olde man, to learne to leere and looke bigge, to curtsie and kisse the hand, to be at your silver forke, and your pick-tooth? Sirra, it is not your Fathers sonne, to trouble his head with trifles. Your Father follows the cart, and thou art not shaped for a courtier."

Then he laments the falling off of religion in the schools, and harks back to the time when school men were wont to teach children to say "Christes crosse be my speede and the holy Ghost." This is the point of view of Brathwaite's *English Gentleman*, where a knowledge of God is paramount in education. In a letter to a young courtier, Breton shows how the courtesy books were adapted to a middle class point of view and assimilated by other forms of literature.¹ Although Castiglione's book is mentioned in the reply to this letter, there is no sign of Italian influence here.

"keepe your purse warily, and your credit charily, your reputation valiantly, and your honour carefully: for your friends, as you finde them use them: for your enemies, feare them not, but looke to them: for your love, let it be secret in the bestowing, and discret in the placing . . . goe neate, but not gay, lest it argue a lightnesse, and take heed of lavish expense, lest it begger thy state."

This is the kind of thing that Shakespeare mocked in Polonius' famous advice to his son. Although Breton may have had his tongue in his cheek here, this same point of view appears in other parts of his work. Finally, a dialogue in *Wits Trenchmour*

¹ See Thompson, E. N. S., *Literary Bypaths of The Renaissance*. 1924.

between an old man, who has spent his life in cony-catching and other crooked shifts and his son emphasizes money as the most important asset to success in life.

Breton's dialogues also touch upon the rogue pamphlets used with such telling effect by Greene, and by his imitators, Rowlands and Dekker, and on the fringe of the picaresque story crystallized into form by Nash's *Unfortunate Traveller* (1594). An interest in roguery goes as far back as Chaucer, and was kept alive throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries by jest-books, ballads, legends, popular tales, characters, and rogue classifications or discourses. Jest-books such as a *Sack Full of Newes* (1557), Skelton's *Merie Tales* (1567), *The Meeting of Gallants at an Ordinarie, or the Walkes in Powles* (1605), and Robert Armin's *Nest of Ninnies* (1608) must have been a part of Breton's stock in trade. Pieces of fiction such as Thomas Deloney's *Gentle Craft* (1597) and the *Pleasant History of Thomas of Reading* and similar works, the "characters" of the seventeenth century, and the discourses on roguery by Audeley and Harman, and the later ones by Greene, Dekker, and Rowlands made of this literature a formidable rival to the court romances of Lyly and Sidney and their followers. The *Miseries of Mauillia*, included among the miscellaneous pamphlets of the *Wil of Wit*, is generally thought to have been inspired by Greene's tales of low life. Greene was Breton's model in court fiction, in later rogue pamphlets, in the use of the dialogue form, and somewhat in the penning of graceful letters. But, since his cony-catching pamphlets fall between 1587 and 1592, the *Miseries of Mauillia*, registered in 1580, cannot have been influenced by them. It is possible that this story was not included in the first collection of tracts entered to the Stationers' Register under the title of the *Wil of Wit*, but added later when the work was published. In that case Greene's pamphlets no doubt supplied the impetus for this attempt at realistic fiction. The incidents in the *Miseries of Mauillia* are picaresque in nature; the heroine lives through one misery only to fall into another, but the gusto and epic sweep of the true picaresque tale are lacking. The heroine is a kind of patient "Grissell," better fitted for a romance than for a story of low life; the villains are unconvincing monsters with no appeal to our intellect or sympathy; and there is none

of the keen observation that was to make Greene the authentic chronicler of picturesque roguery. It is clear that Breton is not at home in these surroundings, yet in 1602 he tried his hand at realistic fiction again. *Wonders Worth The Hearing* ends with a number of scenes from taverns and brothels which are directly imitative of Greene's rogue pamphlets. A young man explains various crooked ways of making money multiply; two leering knaves and a fat quean tell how they earned a tidy sum of money by setting a widow agog for a young gallant, and the young gallant for her, finally marrying her to an old man after they have extracted money from all three; and a knave describes how he was himself deceived and almost reformed when the drab he has foisted off upon an honorable widower becomes a faithful and loving wife. These stories have much of Greene's verve and accuracy of observation and ability with anecdote. The mistaker's counterfeiting of a diseased creature and begging through the country in *A Mad World My Masters* is a typical bit of seventeenth century roguery. *Strange Newes Out Of Divers Countries* touches upon the anatomies of roguery in the description of a fictitious country.

"They have among them certaine Fortune tellers, which use commonly among fooles: and for knaves, they are so cunning that they go under the shadow of honest men. Some odde shavers they have among them, called Die Doppers, whose diving or dopping sometimes proves deadly; for they will dive so closely into your pocket for your purse, that you can hardly see them until they be upon the gallows. Other kinde of close mates there are, that cary Rings in their mouthes, to keepe their tongues within their teeth; and they are called Squiers, but they are only of the order of Apple: their names are often recorded in a Court of Correction, where the Register of Rogues makes no little gaine of Rascabilians. Other kind of subtill companions there are, which are called Setters, which finding yong heads that are narrow in the browes, will feed their humors with such follies, as may either bring them to beggery, or in the height of an idle brain, for wordes above wit, breake the backs of their estates, or send them to heaven in a string. Now these, they say, are great with the Divell, for they do a great deale of mis-

chiefe in the world: their names are onely found in the notes of destruction, for by their hellish courses they sell themselves to damnation. Other kind of knick-knackers there are, which betwixt knave and foole can make no ilfavoured passage through the world."¹

Breton's dialogues have also certain affiliations with the Italian novella. Grimello, in relating his fortunes as a page, tells how he and his fellows played a merry prank on their master, a "lob-lollie" gallant who was forever gaping after women. They dress up a pretty young page as a girl, lodge him across from the master's window, whet the gallant's appetite with tales of the damsel's beauty and chastity, and then give a sumptuous banquet from which the boy carries off a wealth of gifts and protestations only to reappear the next morning as a page wearing the master's ring under his very eyes. *Grimellos Fortunes* also tells the story of the cowardly, swaggering governor of a military post who is put to shame by a merry trick. A waggish soldier comes into town shouting the approach of the enemy; whereupon the panic stricken governor promptly shuts himself up in a sound proof room, only coming out, in response to continual pleadings, to find the whole town in May Day revelry with a king and queen, and a fool made up in his image. Even his braggadocio cannot carry this off. The story of the eel in the same dialogue may have been suggested by the Manciple's story of the crow in the *Canterbury Tales*. A wife, irritated at her husband's care of a pet eel, has the maid kill it and put it into a pie. When the master comes home and asks for his eel, the mag-pie cries out that it has been killed. The maid contents him with the story that his wife is with child, and so has craved the eel, but as soon as he leaves the guilty pair pluck the bird of all its feathers. That night the poor mag-pie perches on her master's shoulder and whispers that he has been plucked as bare as she. In the Manciple's tale the master plucks the crow's feathers because its taunt of "cuckoo" has made him kill his unfaithful wife. *Wits Trenchmour* has a tale in the Italian manner of a lady who deceived her father into a regard for the gallant she hopes to marry, but who has neither fortune nor a place at court. It is to be

¹ *Strange Newes*, p. 6.

remembered that a *Dialogue Full of Pithe and Pleasure* was in part translated out of Italian, and that in his letters, proverbs, and elsewhere, Breton displays a knowledge of Italian.

Finally, these dialogues are related to the drama of the period. Some of the conversation has the homely savour of the shoemakers' talk in Dekker's play, the characters needing only to be expanded and set in action or involved in conflict to become dramatic. The old man's scorn of his son's education in *Wits Trenchmour* is a case in point. The conversation between mistress and maid in the story of the eel has the authentic notes of drama:

"Wench quoth she, doest thou not see what a sturre thy maister keepest with a scurvy Eele? In good earnest a little thing would make me take her out of the Cesterne, and put her in a Pye, or eate her some waie or other: For better have one chiding for all, then have such a doe as we have about her.

"In truth Mistress, quoth she, (as one whose mouth hung verie fitting for such a piece of meate). If it please you, I will quickly ridde you of this trouble. My maister is ridde to your Landlord, and there I know he will tarrie to night: if it please you I will fetch her out of the Cesterne, and kill her, and flea her, and put her in a Pye, and you may dispatch her ere he come, or save a piece for him when he is quiet after his chiding.

"Content wench quoth she, I pray thee dispatch quickly."¹

And with that the eel's fate is settled. The sparkling repartee of an *Olde Mans Lesson And A Young Mans Love* has a little story woven into it—the son tells his father of a gifted young friend of his who has fallen in love with a fair and modest Venetian girl, but who cannot marry her until he have his father's consent and something of a fortune to make his way in the world. When the old man enthusiastically commends the youth's choice, and proffers a loan, his son proclaims himself as the lover, and congratulations and advice are in order. As a whole, however, Breton's dialogues do not involve action; his characters are created only to tell a merry tale or to throw a play of wit over the foibles of mankind. The angler stands with his arms outstretched over the water explaining the propensities of fish and

¹ *Grimellos Fortunes*, p. 13.

the niceties of his craft; the country-man, though having the better of the argument, must defer his triumph to another meeting with the courtier, and the scholar and soldier never reach the end of their journey.

There is no marked difference in style among these dialogues, though proverbs, puns, and word-play are more frequent in the earlier ones than in the more mature pieces. *A Discourse Betwixt Wit and Will* and a *Dialogue Betweene Anger And Patience* are noticeably thin in content; the characters are personified abstractions, and the dialogues lacking in the crisp edge and verve of Breton's later work. The long, loose sentence prevails. An occasional similitude sends a spray of beauty over the thought. A coy girl in *Merry Wonders* looks as demure as a rabbit that has newly washed her face in a dewy morning. The country-man says that faith and truth are their bonds of love, and plain dealing the passage of honesty. The soldier, explaining that the scholar is to be honored for the fruits of his study, asks: "Is not the cinamon tree to be esteemed above ye apple tree?"

Breton is at his best in *Grimellos Fortunes*, *An Old Man's Lesson And A Young Man's Love*, and the *Court And Country*, which are hung with vivid pictures of Tudor life and written with a more serious artistic purpose than the early dialogues. The satire in *Grimellos Fortunes* gives one a true insight into Tudor social conditions. Grimello made no advance in the ministry because words have no weight without gold, and because he could not flatter, bear malice, or abide beggary. At court he was careful to avoid painting his face, refused all superfluity in diet and excess in apparel, and flattery and idle love. He would not be drawn into intrigue nor quarrel for trifles, importune his friends, nor delay suitors. In war, he would not take advantage of the poor soldier, favour the vicious, nor pardon the obstinate, and so found it wise to seek employment elsewhere. Turning to law he met with failure because of his refusal to accept bribes or to take money of the poor. He deprecated the long delays in court and the shifts and quiddities in law cases, and found it impossible to pay for his books, room, and apparel with his small ordinary fees. Farming turned to failure because he would not forestall any market, take a house over a tenant's head, sell rotten trees

for good timber, nor raise the price of grain. All honest livelihoods failing, he was forced to beggary and the shifts of rogues. There are also charming vignettes drawn from life which prognosticate the Sir Roger de Coverley papers with their mixture of quaintness and generic truth. The vicar in a *Mad World My Masters* tells how twice a year he brings his rent to the parson, and perhaps a couple of capons against Christmas for his landlady, how his parishoners love a pot of ale better than a pulpit, and a corn-rick better than a church door.

"tho comming to divine services, more for fashion then devotion, are contented after a little capping and kneeling, coughing and spitting, to helpe me to sing out a Psalme, and sleepe at the second Lesson, or awake to stand up at the Gospel, and say Amen at The Peace of God."¹

It is not a far cry from this passage to the Sir Roger de Coverley papers, with the mingling of eccentricity and absolute fidelity to life. The variety of mood and content in these dialogues, the use of pastoral, allegorical, satirical, picaresque, and courtly modes, and the facility with which the author adapts himself to the mode in hand, and their closeness to the familiar essay give these dialogues a large share in the interest Breton has for us.

BRETON'S DEVOTIONAL TRACTS

Religious and devotional prose was common throughout the seventeenth century. In those days of religious upheaval and changing creeds, the literature of theological controversy enjoyed a vogue sometimes far out of proportion to its intrinsic value. Sermons, allegories, emblems, books of precepts, and religious essays carried on the traditions of mediaeval ecclesiastical writing. The Contemplations and Meditations of a varied writer like Joseph Hall, and the sermons of a great writer like John Donne; prayers, meditations, and resolves, which approach the familiar essay in their intimacy of tone and absence of rigid form; and the devotional pamphlets of men like Breton, Dekker, and Nash run the gamut of religious moods from an acute and complicated theology to simple homely piety and an intense passion for social justice. Breton's religious verse, his two prose tracts

¹ *A Mad World*, p. 8.

given over to devotional matter, and parts of other tracts make up his contributions here. I have noted before, the absence of controversy and dogma in his religious work. Although he displays a Puritanical feeling at times in regard to social vices, his religious tracts are the work neither of a non-conformist nor of a conformist, but merely the speaking out of his heart. Here again he approaches the familiar essay. His devout little prayers on certain Biblical passages well up from within; they are not made for definite occasions or for the services of the Church calendar; they are less complete in range and more intimate in feeling than Dekker's *Four Birdes of Noah's Arke*, which they resemble in other ways. Breton was twelve years in advance of Dekker here. The subjects of these prayers resemble the personal essay—the beauty of holiness and of charity, the blessings of humility, and the sweet savour of mercy, “sweeter then hony and the hony combe.” *Divine Considerations* stands midway between the meditation and essay. It is a plea for keener awareness in the presence of God, contrasting the weakness, wickedness, ignorance, malice, cruelty, baseness and ignominy of man with the greatness, goodness, wisdom, love, mercy, grace and glory of God, and set down in the form of short meditations. Both tracts are personal and individual in tone, as alien to the social and denunciatory manner of Nash as to any hint of ecclesiasticism.

Maries Exercise breathes the spirit of devotion and piety and a sweet charity toward man. There are prayers upon the story of Mary and Martha, the meeting of Elizabeth with the blessed virgin, Christ and the woman of Samaria, the widow's two mites, the devotion of Anna, the transfiguration, magnificat, and other Biblical themes. The style is very allusive, so interwoven with scriptural image and story that it is hard to disentangle the threads. Breton must have known the Psalms and the Song of Solomon so well that they had become a second speech with him. The following has echoes of Psalm LXXXIV, verse one, parts of other psalms, and the Song of Solomon.

“O How amiable are Thy dwellings my dear Lord Jesus, how pleasant are Thy graces? and how comfortable are Thy mercies? more sweet are they to my hart then hony unto my mouth, yea sweeter then hony and the hony combe.”

This is the allusive quality that Lamb displays in a later period, not capable of explanation through footnotes, but an integral part of the text. The use of imagery is best when he adheres closest to the Bible. The prayer—"keep mee under the shadow of Thy wings," or "put mee not out of the booke of Thy remembrance," or the image of the soul famished for lack of God's holy word, or man as a polluted vessel of the earth, or God's mercy as a fountain never dry, are beautiful indeed. At other times, Breton is prone to carry the similitude too far, wrenching it out of its natural surroundings. The following is one of many examples.

"An humble sutor I am, oh heavenly king, to Thy holy maiesty, not for my two sonnes, but the two parts of my selfe, my soule and my body, y^t it will please Thy gracious goodnesse, so far to take them either at Thy right hand or Thy left, but, in one looke of Thy comfort, to make them but cushins for Thy feet, where more ioyfull shall bee my tears to wash the feete of Thy favoure, then all the pleasures of the world, to bee away from Thy mercy."

The image of the soul begotten of God, quickened in the body as Christ in the womb of the Virgin, bred by the Holy Spirit, nourished in its infancy on the sweet milk of God's mercy, savours of the materialism of mediaeval Catholic writers. Compared with Dekker's use of imagery in the *Four Birdes of Noah's Arke*, Breton's is lacking in fervency and imagination. Prayer like a dove, flying up again and again and beating at the door of Heaven, or, like the phoenix nest, rising in bright flames all the days of our life; the lamps of heaven lit again at Christ's triumph and the graves that yawned and cast out their dead closing up their devouring jaws are images controlled by Dekker's strong imagination. Another affectation in Breton is the stringing together of descriptive phrases and similitudes until they become counters without value or meaning. In one sentence God is praised as the sum of all sweetness, the substance of all goodness, the joy of the heart, the comfort of the mind and the life of the soul, the portion of one's inheritance, the longing of his heart, and the only Heaven to be hoped for. Since this is a device used to excess in *Divine Considerations* published eleven years later, and of *Characters Upon Essaies*, and the *Good and the Badde*, it can not

be set down to Breton's artistic immaturity. In part these seeming affectations argue an interest in prose as an instrument of thought—he could not leave off playing with words and using frequent antitheses in an effort to attain emphasis, or avoid expanding his sentences to an unconscionable length in an attempt to say all that his fertile mind could think of or to reach successive climaxes by a series of rising phrases or questions. The second prayer in *Maries Exercise* is composed entirely of one long sentence, with frequent pauses and full stops, but no ending until Mary's devotion in contrast to Martha's worldliness has been overlaid with prayer, ejaculation, praise, and personal application. The long sentence is better adapted to this type of writing than to many others, giving at times the effect of breathless aspiration rather than of running on until the race is up. There are many beautiful rhythms in these prayers arising from the sincerity and poignancy of the emotion. The following passage is an illustration of this effective use of pause and of Breton's approach to the language of mediaeval sermons which have been influenced by the love courts and the love verse to Christ and the Virgin.

“Nothing is more comfortable to my soule then the meditation of Thy mercy: sweet Iesu, Thou alone art Hee whom my soule loveth, and iust cause, for by Thy onely love, my soule liveth: when I behold Thee in my hart, I have enough for my comfort and wanting Thy grace, I consume away with calamitie.”

It is passages like this that give an enduring value to *Maries Exercise*. In still other prayers Christ is addressed as the husband of the soul, its dearest love, and gracious Lord. In spite of Breton's adaptability to changing modes, he is often reminiscent of the Middle Ages, the conservative tendency in him being as strong as the instinct for what will appeal to his public.

Although *Divine Considerations* was published eleven years after *Maries Exercise*, it shows no advance in workmanship and often falls below the level of the earlier tract. It is prolix in its moralizing, monotonous in style, and spread rather thin as to substance. Although written as a meditation upon God and His glory and goodness in contrast to the sins and shortcomings of man, *Divine Considerations* lacks some of the intimacy which

brings a work of this kind very close to the heart. Thomas Traherne's *Centuries of Meditations*, a much later work and mystical in its tendency, reveals a boy's vision of God as he looks out upon the orient and immortal wheat, never to be reaped and never even sown, or as the dust and stones of the street turn to gold and the gates open upon the end of the world. There is little of this intimacy and tenderness in Breton, nor the mystical faith which makes the world the place of angels and the gate of Heaven, where God has been and we knew it not. Hall's meditations occasionally flower in beauty; the thought rises, and the language becomes stately and rhythmical. Breton, however, rather often loses himself in flourishes of style which are more marked here than in *Maries Exercise*. Direct quotation has taken the place of the subtly allusive quality of the earlier work. Strings of epithets and descriptive phrases, frequent antitheses, and word play are used to excess. Although none of these devices argues a lack of sincerity, the word play of the following passage seems out of place in a religious meditation.

"These and a world of such idle fooles, least I should be thought too much a foole, for standing too much upon the foole, I leave further to talke of, and hoping that the wise will confesse, that all the wisdome of the worlde is foolishnesse before God. . . ."

Breton is at his best when thinking on the goodness and mercy of God. Here the thought is touched with lyricism, spurting up with beauty, and breathing the sincerity and devotion of the earlier work. Many of these short rhapsodies reveal the mood and manner of the personal essay. The images are inspired by the Bible. We see the hills which shall smoke and the mountains which melt at His presence, man as the chosen vessel of grace, without God a blasted flower, and the heavens as the work of God's hands. The prayer at the end of this work restores its personal quality, and shows that it was meant, not as a discourse on religious matters, but as a meditation on things close to the heart.

BRETON'S WRITINGS IN THE LETTER FORM

Letter writing must have been an important affair in the days of Queen Elizabeth and James I. Without the newspaper, tele-

graph, and telephone, much of the daily business of life had to be transacted through letters, and with travel an exhausting and hazardous undertaking, letters became the highway between friends and an invaluable instrument in business and statescraft. The Elizabethans inherited an interest in the art of letter writing from the formularies of the Middle Ages, and from the Renaissance collections of ancient letters and treatises on letter-writing, considered then as a branch of oratory, and from the zeal with which the art was cultivated in fashionable circles in Italy, France, and Spain. As far as I know, Breton's is the distinction of having been first to write a series of familiar letters in English with a distinctly artistic purpose. It is true that a *Poste with a Packet of Mad Letters*, published in two parts in 1603, is a complete letter-writer after the fashion of Angel Day's *English Secreterie*, but without the rules and rhetorical discussion. The letters fall into the classes enumerated by rhetoricians and formulists of the Middle Ages and early Renaissance. Erasmus had dictated that familiar letters might deal with news, gossip, congratulation, lament, request, courtesies, and mirth, categories into which Breton's letters very easily fit. But Breton had not the point of view of a teacher of correspondence. Practically all of his letters are familiar and are written more to please and divert than to illustrate the principles of oratory or to teach the inexperienced how to carry on a correspondence. The uninformed might have learned much from reading these letters, but it is doubtful whether anyone ever read them with that purpose in mind. It is this point that gives Breton the honor of having been the first writer of familiar letters in English. The honor is usually conceded to Joseph Hall whose epistle in 1608 are written to actual personages with a larger audience in mind, and not as models of correct letter-writing. This is, I think, too fine a distinction. Although Breton observed the classification of the old formularies and his letters resemble the illustrative parts of Angel Day's book, he wrote with a freedom and zest not characteristic of books of rhetoric and with an artistic purpose in mind. His letters answered the Tudor interest in anecdotes, jests, pithy comment, and genre painting, an interest which inspired most of his pamphlets. The style is bright and sparkling and concise,

lit up here and there by beautiful similitudes, varied and deft in movement. It is Breton's essay style almost at its best.

I have already indicated one of Breton's sources in the formularies and treatises on rhetoric popular in the early Renaissance. There are other sources, however. The romances of Lyly and Greene are strewn with imaginary letters, couched in choice and beautiful English, and written as much to show a fine gentleman how he ought to address his lady or his friend in distant parts as to carry on the thread of the story. *Euphues* has a number of graceful letters and Greene's heroes are moved to pen epistles in Euphuistic fashion upon every pretext whatsoever. *Planetomachia* contains two beautiful love letters, and *Mamillia* a number of epistles which portray varying degrees of respect, love, and scorn. Since Breton was influenced by Greene's work to use the dialogue form and to try his hand at court fiction and the rogue pamphlet, it is altogether likely that he derived the idea of imaginary letters in which to display the grace of his style from Greene. Another source was the *Golden Epistles* of Guevara, the Spanish humanist, translated into English by Geoffrey Fenton in 1577, and many times thereafter. Guevara's letters are little essays in the manner of Seneca with a marked didactic and moral purpose. Although the content of a *Poste with a Packet of Mad Letters* is somewhat lighter than Guevara's discussions, the style and point of view of the two men are much the same. Both are fond of antithesis and rhetorical flourish. I have noted before that Breton's device of throwing his ideas into groups of four was probably derived from Guevara. Both are moralists. Guevara's notion of a gentleman is very similar to Breton's. A man is a gentleman not because of noble blood, or power, or riches, but because he is liberal in giving, sober in diet, honest in living, tender in pardoning, and valiant in fighting. It is not enough that he talk of his ancient lineage; he must equal or better the deeds of his ancestors. Almost the same conception occurs in Breton's letters and in his dialogues. Both authors show a distrust of court life and for the same reasons.¹ Breton could hardly have missed knowing Guevara, because of his great popularity in England, and could not but have been drawn to him because of his point of view and stylistic graces.

¹ See discussion of the Court and Country.

Breton's letters sound almost all the melodies of love with harsher tones of hate and scorn at times. A town wit writes his mistress in the approved style of Euphuism, and a countryman makes a plain avowal of his love with the promise of a rabbit for which he has ferreted all night and a cheese cake of his mother's baking to follow. A young man writes to his love as the first star to bring him to the study of astronomy. A bachelor promises a rich widow a love that will end but with death and an old man proffers a young woman a love chastened by the years and an estimate of himself in no way mean. "I know you have many sutors of worth, but none that I thinke more worthy then my selfe."

Many of these love letters breathe the spirit of devotion; others are touched with April gaiety, and still others are written in anger and scorn. The letter to a "faire proud Tit," who counterfeits lipping so that she cannot bring out one wise word, and whose farthingale is so great that she makes an antic of herself, called for an equally impudent reply. The love letter to Mistress E. P. sends the imagination back over the love poetry of the Elizabethan age:

"As in silence you may heare me, so in absence you may see me: for love is not an houres humour, nor a shadow of light, but it is a light of the spirit and a continuing passion."¹

The letters as a whole meet almost every conceivable situation calling for correspondence. If so disposed, a father might learn from them how to admonish his son who had gone up to the university or to London to serve an apprenticeship or to gain experience of life, and the son how to make answer, showing gratitude for his maintenance and education, reassuring his father as to his conduct while from home, or, under cover of the gratitude, asking for money. Or, the jealous husband could see how to recall his wife from her light behavior, tattling with gossips, idling with young men, and spending money foolishly, and the cunning wife how to laugh him out of his "dumps;" the merchant how to advise his factor; a traveller beyond the seas how to greet his wife; a younger brother how to put to scorn his elder, who having fallen upon a little wealth had grown suddenly proud; a creditor

¹ Letter 37, Second Book.

how to serve notice to his debtor, and a friend how to tender advice or a gift—a rundlet of sack and a sugar loaf mayhap. There are letters of condolence to a woman whose husband has gone to the Indies, to a man who has lost his wife, and to another who has fallen into sickness, with the rather cold comfort that there is no day but has its night and that sickness brings the hand of God very near and with it a lesson in patience. The two last draw forth the rather sharp retort that one who has never understood love cannot feel its loss, and that it is easy for those in health to counsel the sick. A father invites an old friend to his daughter's wedding; there are letters introducing a servant, or addressed to a judge in behalf of an offender who merits justice seasoned with mercy, business letters of various types, and letters asking for an explanation of coldness or patching a lover's quarrel. Friendship receives due recognition in a letter to one whose society is more to be desired than the wealth of the Indies, to another who has lately received an honor, and to another whose past kindnesses are never to be forgotten.

The letters of advice show the moral and practical trend of Breton's mind and his relationship to Guevara's *Golden Epistles*. A father warns his son not to stand surety for his friend: "What you can spare your friend, deny him not, but as you love your libertie, beware of sealing and delivering. . . ."

Another father advises his son at the University to serve God, keep a good conscience, not to pass the limits of allegiance, nor build castles in the air, nor converse with fools, nor follow women, to beware drunkenness, to eschew prodigality, to follow his studies diligently, and to have little to do with "alchymestry, which is a great charge and profiteth few."

I have noted before the relation of parts of these letters and the dialogues to seventeenth century courtesy books. This letter, the one to a young courtier quoted earlier in the paper, and the advice to a University student to "study all the Arts superficially, but chiefly arithmetick; bee not ignorant in Divinity . . . and take heed of Poetry, lest it run away with thy wits" are illustrations of the manner in which the courtesy books were absorbed in other types of literature. The last quotation also shows Breton's gaiety, which turns even the most serious thought

or most practical advice to pleasantry. It is this quality in Breton that makes him an essayist in his own right and a letter writer with merits beyond those of the complete letter books and treatises on rhetoric. Other letters of advice are to a virgin in London to beware her chastity, to a friend warning him against the amorous humor into which he has fallen, to another friend urging him to marriage, and to still another warning him against marriage. The pains of marriage and the joys have almost an equal chance in these letters.

These letters are more than models for the art of polite correspondence or the transacting of business, if they were ever used in that capacity; they afford very amusing glimpses into the social usages of the times. A lover in serio-comic vein reminds his sweetheart Margery how they had met at the sign of the Blue Anchor, and had sworn to be faithful one to the other, how she had made him buy her a ring and a heart that cost him eighteen pence, and had given him in return a napkin to wear in his hat, only to have faced about and made herself sure to a neighbour's son, ending with a threat in the manner of a *Wooing Song of a Yeoman of Kent's Son*: "God will plague you, there are more maids then maulkin, and I count myself worth the whistling after."

An honest country lover, whose letters are written by the school-master when not too busy with his boys, tells his sweetheart that he will see her on Sunday, if his high shoes come home in time, and she, in her turn, describes how the serving-man reads his letters to her over and over again, how her mother has stolen a whole peck of flour for a bride-cake, and the serving man has sworn to steal a brave rosemary bush, and she has spoken for ale "that will make a cat speake." In another letter, Margerie promises to meet her lover at the Pickerill and Spurre "bringing a piece of bacon in her pocket to act as relish to a cup of ale." A younger brother laughs to scorn his elder's pretensions to fashion—"your ruffes set up in print, your beard so starched, and your countenance so set, that you are more meet for a prologue before a comedie, then to give example of civilitie."

Since these letters are literary exercises, it is vain to look for autobiographical notices or references to Breton's contem-

poraries. Letter twenty-two of the first series contains a certain Shakespearian allusion—"for I saw the play of Ancient Pistoll, where a cracking coward was well cudgeld for his knavery." Various letters already noted, appear to establish Breton's residence at Oriel College.¹ Letter nineteen of the second series, signed N. B., and written out of a troubled spirit, seems to refer to a personal condition but even here we cannot be sure whether these are real or fanciful references.

I have noted before the style of these letters and their relationship to the familiar essay. They are tentative little sallies into education, morality, love, wit, and the business of daily living. The style is exactly like that of Breton's essays. Nowhere else in his writing is there a more beautiful use of similitude. A dull spirit fed on oblivion, conscience as a sanctuary where the soul may take its rest, an earthly Paradise in the passage of two lovers, the small pleasure that affection takes in ceremonies, a pining sickness, debts as a crack in credit, a deformed conceit, love crying audience and standing to the beloved's arbitrament—images in profusion send a spray of beauty over these pages.

That these letters were immensely popular is attested by the number of editions published during Breton's lifetime, and by Breton's imitators and followers in the field. Joseph Hall's *Epistles* introduce the Senecan tradition into English. They are written of the contempt of the world, of true honor, against the fear of death, of miracles, of travel, and the like. Although more serious in tone than Breton's letters they are not superior in style or content. The dignity of his manner and the occasional pomp of language are in consonance with the seriousness of the subject-matter and Hall's moral purpose in writing. The letters are rich in thought. He says that nothing can quit the cost and labor of travel but the gain of wisdom, that there is no honor except it reside in virtue, and that to think of death is to overcome the fear of it. Hall's use of similitude is good. He writes of one who lives out of the reach of envy, of the careful pomp of the mighty, of the misery of a galled conscience, and of retirement as a sanctuary of peace. These letters, however, lack the

¹ See discussion of Breton's life.

variety of Breton's, and his verve and gaiety. They are serious moral discourses. Taken together, Breton and Hall indicate the future of the letter, which was to develop side by side with the familiar essay and the more serious moral essay. Although Owen Feltham's *Taste of Some Letters* goes back to the old letterbooks, the letter writers to follow adhered to the essay style.

James Howell's *Ho-Eliana*, written during a varied and interesting career, is a case in point. Although these letters purport to have been sent to actual personages, some of them appear to be mere literary exercises, after the fashion of Breton, and written long after the events with which they are concerned. Be that as it may, Howell has the gift of the true letter-writer and essayist. He knew how to bring back the riches of other countries in his observations, and to write of himself and his interests with ease and charm. The letters discourse of all the happenings of the day—the proposed Spanish match with its long drawn out ceremonies, the death of Bacon and of James I, the mad genius of Ben Jonson, the assassination of the Duke of Buckingham, the visitation of the plague, and similar matters. There are apt observations on his travels, and little essays on letterwriting, translating, cookery, and politics. Passages in praise of friendship, a treasure far above that of St. Mark's, carry the mind back to Breton's letters. In fact, Howell is much closer to Breton than is Hall, who was his contemporary. Both have a keen zest for life; both are fond of quips and jests and anecdotes; and both minds are stored with a fund of quaint knowledge.

BRETON AS CHARACTER WRITER

From the point of view of literary history, Breton's character sketches are more important than his collection of letters. Quick to respond to public interest in character portrayal and analysis, he followed on the heels of Hall and Overbury with his *Characters Upon Essaies* in 1615, in which he applies the concrete method of the "character" to the subject-matter of the essay. Wisdom, patience, love, truth, resolution, and other abstractions are described in pointed little sketches and embellished with all the wit and flourish of style at his command. He begins with a definition of wisdom or faith, enumerates the qualities belonging

to it as the character writer names the eccentricities of a type or class of persons, and ends with a terse little summary or epigram meant to clinch the whole affair. The result of this fusion resembles the "character" more nearly than the essay. Although Breton implies in the dedication of this book to Sir Francis Bacon that the character of an essay was a recognized variation of the two forms even then, I can find no example of it before *Characters Upon Essaies*. The fact that many similar combinations followed, and that the two terms were often confused or used in conjunction in the titles of seventeenth century essays shows the popularity of this experiment. In the following year Breton brought out the *Good And The Badde*, a series of fifty "characters," all but the last twelve in contrasting pairs, and arranged according to rank in society. A worthy and unworthy king and queen, a nobleman and an "unnoble man," an honest man and a knave preach a moral lesson by way of contrast. These sketches are flimsy and excessively mannered and lacking in concreteness; the author shows an aversion to plain statement, and echoes of the Euphuists in his use of antithesis and alliteration.

In these sketches Breton identifies himself with an important phase of literary activity in the seventeenth century. In a sense the "character" is an aftermath of that Renaissance curiosity which discovered a lively interest in everything pertaining to man. It is another way of saying that nothing human is alien to the spirit of man. The Jacobean "character" is a conventional picture of a class or type, which uses the method of enumeration rather than analysis, and depends for its effect very often on the author's wit and deftness of style rather than his knowledge of character. Hence Overbury's description of the "character" as "wits descant on any plaine song." Since the "character" is concerned with the type, descriptions of particular individuals cannot be included here, but rather among the portraits. The method is to enumerate the eccentricities of this type as they appear in an individual, taking care to name only those individual traits which have also a generic value. The glutton, knave, beggar, and amorist; the wise, impudent, or melancholy man; the puny clerk, gentleman of the University, or inns of court man are little more than pegs on which the virtues or vices of

their class are hung. It is no easy matter to describe a personage who will be at once typical and individual. Nor is character analysis easy within the rigid limits of this genre. There can be but one point of view, and not the shifting lights and shadows of the novel, nor the opportunity for conflict or development which the drama affords, nor the discursive comment of the essay. The artist adds touch on touch until the full length picture hangs before us. There are occasional flashes of discernment, however; character is illumined for us by the author's intuition into the springs of action or thought, by an apt use of figure, or by a vivid and relevant detail which sets forth the essential quality of a man. That a character sketch such as this will be disconnected is almost inevitable; epigrams are broken over a man's head in the service of wit, and traits are often chosen with little reference one to the other, but because of their vividness or their bearing on morality. Flecknoe's description of the genre shows that this is an accepted condition. He says that the "character" "gives you the hint of a discourse, but discourses not. . . . It says not all, but all it says is good, and like an aire in musick is either full of clozes, or still driving towards a close."¹ But to object to the conventionality of the character or to its disconnectedness is like finding fault with the sun because it is too bright. The character writers accepted the conditions of the art in which they worked, hardly thinking of them as limitations. Like the novelists of the preceding century, they were not rigid realists; even with types from real life as their subject, they were concerned more with artifice and device than with a strict fidelity to life.

Character writing in England is much older than the seventeenth century, going as far back as the *Canterbury Tales*, but first practiced as an independent genre in this period. Vivid characterizations are scattered up and down the literature of the sixteenth century: Barclay's translation of the *Narrenschiff* (1509); Thomas Audeley's *Fraternity Of Vagabonds* (1561); Thomas Harman's *Caveat for Common Cursitors* (1567); Geoffrey Fenton's translation of *Guevara's Epistles* (1577); and various pamphlets of Greene, Dekker, and Nash show a tendency to hit off characters in vivid, arresting fashion. But these are not brought

¹ Flecknoe, Richard, *Enigmaticall Characters*.

together in groups and very often are not typical. The ultimate origins of the type go very far back indeed. Theophrastus, who penned thirty sketches from Athenian life in the last quarter of the fourth century before Christ, and Jonson's thumb-nail sketches in the *dramatis personae* of his comedy are the primary sources. The lectures of Scaliger and Casaubon on the characters of Theophrastus, and Casaubon's later translation of the characters in 1592 brought the Theophrastian tradition into England. Richard Adlington spins a not unlikely theory by which these characters came into England through the learned King James. He was a scholar; he knew Casaubon's translation of Theophrastus, and in 1610 invited him to England upon an ecclesiastical matter. What more natural than that King James should have asked why there were no "characters" in English? And what more natural than that Hall, a courtier as well as a divine, and Overbury, who was in the king's service, should have busied themselves in making up the lack? Hall professes his indebtedness to Theophrastus, and although his strong moral bias kept him from the humor and geniality of Theophrastus, he shows a rather close adherence to his model. Theophrastus' method is simple and economic. He observed human nature with the detachment and impartiality of Homer. There is not a line more than is necessary in his sharp little pen sketches. The outlines are clear; neither the types nor the characteristic actions are allowed to overlap; and there is a nice balance between individual and generic traits. Without artifice or pretension of any sort, these sketches are in striking contrast to the English character, which depends on subjective interpretation and comment, and bristles with learning and artifice, adopting any means at hand to avoid plain statement. To strip Overbury's sketches of the author's wit or Breton's of artifice and pious moralizing would be to destroy the sketch entirely. The English character often sacrifices relevancy in detail to an interest in the odd and picturesque; it enumerates moral qualities rather than actions, and is never detached or impartial. Finally the extension of the "character" in England to include places and institutions makes it a valuable record of the past.

Although the influence of Theophrastus was felt throughout

the period, that of Ben Jonson was perhaps stronger. It is certain that the first English characters appear in his *Every Man Out Of His Humour*, 1599, and published in 1601, seven years before Hall's *Characters Of Vertues And Vices*. The dramatis personae of *Every Man Out Of His Humour* consists of fifteen sketches that show the adaptation of the Theophrastian ideal to English surroundings. All through Jonson's plays, moreover, the convention of having actors on the stage describe those about to enter is observed; and these descriptions are very close to the "character." In *Cynthia's Revels*, acted in 1600, the sketches are moved into the body of the text. Amorphus, sublimated and refined by travel, is first cousin to Overbury's affected traveller. Both are tedious in conversation, usurping the floor whenever possible; both will resort to lies and braggadocio rather than pass unnoticed in a group; both pretend to an intimate acquaintance with the great; and both are devoted to fashion as to a religion. Certainly the Jonsonian comedy of humors had as much to do with the development of the "character" as the work of Theophrastus.

Thus Breton had a long tradition on which to build. In characteristic manner, he waited until the fashion had been set by Hall's *Characters of Vertues And Vices* in 1608, and Overbury's characters, probably written about the same time, and appended along with those of a number of his friends to the 1614 edition of a *Wife*, and enlarged upon later. Breton's first book of characters is an attempt to combine essay and "character" and is important in indicating the future development of the "character." The two forms seem to have been related from the beginning. The essayist gained point and concreteness from the character writer; the "character" became less stiff, and more analytical and discursive from its association with the essay. This relationship is clear in the works of John Stephens and Geffray Mynshul, who used both forms. That the "character" should have been absorbed by the eighteenth century periodical essay is the logical outcome of experiments such as Breton's.

It is probable that Breton's characters owe more to Sir Francis Bacon than to Hall and Overbury. In the dedication of *Characters Upon Essaies* to Sir Francis Bacon, Breton acknowledges his indebtedness.

"Worthy Knight, I have read of many Essaies, and a kinde of Charactering of them, by such as when I lookt into the forme, or nature of their writing, I have beene of the conceit, that they were but Imitators of your breaking the ice to their inventions; which, how short they fall of your worth, I had rather thinke then speake, though Truth neede not blush at her blame. Now, for my selfe unworthy to touch neere the Rocke of Diamonds, or to speake in their praise, . . . I beseech you, among those Apes that would counterfit the actions of men, to play the like part with learning, and as a Monkey, that would make a face like a Man, and cannot, so to write like a Scholler and am not: and thus . . . I leave these poore Travells of my Spirit to the perusing of your pleasing leasure. . . ." Breton's style in these characters is very similar to that of Bacon's earlier essays. Both writers use abstractions as subject-matter, and sometimes the same abstraction, and both are disconnected and sententious, leaning more toward the epigram than the coherent sketch or essay. But here the likeness ends. Instead of Bacon's rigid economy of statement, we have a multiplicity of descriptive detail; in place of Bacon's spare but beautiful images, long series of metaphors and a monotonous use of personification; for Bacon's rich practical wisdom Breton's superficial observations and endless moralizing; and instead of Bacon's short, pithy sentences, Breton's long, loose ones. In justice to Breton, however, it must be observed that the sentences in these sketches are held in check somewhat and that the neat antitheses and parallel clauses or phrases give the effect of economy. In fact many of the clauses separated from their neighbours by colons or semicolons are complete in themselves and might be taken as short sentences. Breton abuses various devices of Euphuism which came to him through Greene's romances. Alliteration, both simple and transverse, and balanced phrases and clauses are frequent. He very often repeats the prefix or suffix of a word. Another affectation, perhaps referable as far back as the Spanish humanist Guevara, is the arrangement of his ideas in sets of four. The *Figure Of Foure* is made up wholly of such enumerations. Perhaps Breton's most characteristic mannerism is his use of a long series of descriptive phrases or similitudes. Truth is described

in one sentence as the glory of time, the daughter of eternity, a title of the highest grace, a note of divine nature, the life of religion, the light of love, the grace of wit, the crown of wisdom, the beauty of valor, the brightness of honor, the blessing of reason, and the joy of faith. The following passage illustrates all of his mannerisms.

"Death is an ordinance of God, for the subiecting of the world, which is limited his time for the correction of Pride; in his substance, he is nothing, being but only a deprivation, and in his true description, a name without a nature: He is seene but in a picture: heard but in a tale: feared but in a passion: and felt but in a pinch. He is a terror but to the wicked and a skar-crow but to the foolish: but to the wise a way of comfort and to the godly the gate to life: He is the ease of paine and the ende of sorrow, the liberty of the imprisoned and the joy of the faithfull."¹

And yet it is only Bacon's substance and rigid economy of expression that are lacking in Breton. The aim with both is to use language as an art and to make of it a pliant and quick servitor of thought. That the result is not the same in both authors is a matter of genius in contrast to newspaper craftsmanship. We have only to lay Breton's sketches beside those of almost any of his contemporaries of the same class to see the effect of the neat antitheses and balanced constructions into which his sentences are broken up. His mannerisms are an indication of the fact that style was a vital matter to him. He was not content with a haphazard manner, but was bent on making the sentence conform to a pattern. Although he carries the use of imagery to excess, individual similitudes are often very effective: "honor has the richest coat in the heraldry of heaven;" "patience is a kind of heavenly Tenure, whereby the Soule is held in possession, and a sweet temper in the Spirit;" peace is "like the still night, where all things are at rest, and the quiet sleep."

Breton's *Good And The Badde* in 1616 is an excursion into the "character" proper with the same method as that of *Character Upon Essaies*. The author gives us composite pictures of the good king, queen, prince, privy counsellor, nobleman, bishop,

¹ "Characters Upon Essaies," p. 9.

judge, knight, gentleman, lawyer, soldier, physician, and merchant, heightening the moral lesson by contrasting each of these with an unworthy member of the same class. A group of miscellaneous sketches follows. The method is to define the type, enumerate its characteristic qualities in balanced or parallel clauses, and close with a neat little summary. These "characters" often resolve themselves into a series of definitions or metaphors which show very little progression and have little connection one with the other. The details lack vividness; phrases from which the sheen has been rubbed off are sometimes chosen because of their sound or to complete the sentence pattern; and the observation of character is not very penetrating. At times Breton enumerates the qualities of an office rather than of the person holding it. Perhaps their deepest blemish as characters is the fact that one type is rather often described in terms belonging to another. A knave is never to be mistaken for a villain, and yet Breton describes him as a fox in wit, a wolf with its prey, and a devil in pride. His studies are subtlety and his practices villainies. Some of the traits given an atheist belong more accurately to a glutton or sensualist. The parasite shares the characteristics of a go-between. "He is sometimes a pander to carry messages of ill meetings and hath some eloquence to persuade sweetness in sinne."

As a character writer Breton lags somewhat behind his predecessors. He lacks the quaintly vivid detail of Hall and the stately music of his prose, the point and brilliancy of Overbury, though his knowledge of character is not inferior, and the ability to discern character beneath its external shows which sets Stephens above his contemporaries. He is too much concerned with the artifices of style and pious moralizing to describe with accuracy or impartiality. Antithesis and alliteration occur here, though not as frequently as in *Characters Upon Essaies*: personification is carried to excess, and the descriptions are monotonous, in part because of the strings of epithets and similitudes, and also because of the sameness of sentence structure. The subject of the character sketch is almost invariably the subject of the sentence, and the verb to be appears as predicate in almost every sentence. The description of a nobleman may be taken as an example.

"A Nobleman is a marke of honour, where the eye of wisdom in the observation of desert sees the fruit of grace. Hee is the Orient pearle that Reason polisheth for the beauty of Nature and the diamond spark where the divine grace gives Vertue honour. He is the note-book of morall discipline where the conceit of care may finde the true courtier. He is the nurse of hospitality, the reliefe of necessitie, the love of charity and the life of bounty. Hee is learning's grace, and labour's fame, wisdom's fruit and kindnesse' love."

Breton at times drops his formulas and describes with his eye faithfully on the subject, especially in the sketches of the unworthies. An unworthy physician is "never without old merry tales, and stale jests to make olde folkes laugh, and cumfits, or Plummes in his pocket, to please little children." The description of a coward, with his mixture of superstition and cowardice, of an untrained soldier who marches as if he were at plough, of an unworthy bishop who is but the shadow of a candle, of an unworthy lawyer who can read only the superscriptions of letters, but is ignorant of their contents, and of the effeminate fool are vivid indeed. The character of the effeminate fool gives a good account of pastimes that were considered frivolous then. He loves "to talke idly, to looke demurely, to goe nicely, and to laugh continually; to be his mistresse' servant and her mayds master, his father's love, and his mother's none-child; to play on a fiddle and sing a love-song, to weare sweet gloves and looke on fine things; to make purposes and write verses, devise riddles and tell lies; to follow plaies and study daunces, to heare newes and buy trifles . . . to ride in a coach and gallop a hackney, to watch all night and sleepe out the morning; to lie on a bed and take tobacco and to send his page of an idle message to his mistresse; to go uppon gigs, to have his ruffles set in print, to picke his teeth, and play with a puppet."¹

Some of Breton's images are apt and vivid—an honest man is a "plaine coat, which without welt or gard, keepeth the body from winde and weather and being well made fits him that weares it"; a wise man is a "clocke that never strikes but at his home"; a quiet woman is a "still winde, which neither chills the body, nor

¹ *The Good And The Badde*, p. 13.

blowes dust in the face," and an old man is a withered tree that has lost the sap of the root or an old lute with strings all broken.

Although Breton names Sir Francis Bacon as his model in character writing, he has certain affiliations with Hall and Overbury who gave the "character" its vogue in England. Joseph Hall, who was the first to cultivate the character sketch as an independent genre, published his *Characters Of Vertues And Vices* in 1608. Hall and Breton have the same general conception of the "character"; they treat of vices as well as virtues, and are both more successful with the vice than virtue; they are alike in moral bias, and an excessive use of antithesis, pointed descriptions and definitions, and somewhat commonplace observations. Both describe one type in terms belonging to another. But Hall's sketch is fuller and more vivid than Breton's. He goes beyond mere description to the warp of mind or character which produces a man's eccentricities. There are few things in Breton as vivid as Hall's sketch of the busybody, whose estate is too narrow for his mind, and who therefore makes himself room in others' affairs, always under the pretence of love. He harbours another man's servant and in the midst of his entertainment pries into his neighbour's affairs, asking about the meals, the hours that are kept, the master's disposition and the discipline of his household, and the guests that are entertained. Breton's attempt to write a neat, antithetic, epigrammatic prose forbade such excursions into the vivid bypaths of characterization or any deep probing under surface traits. It is to be remembered that Breton is at his best with carefree little dialogues, pictures etched out of the countryside, and whimsical characters who have no closer relation to reality than the personages of an Elizabethan novel. It is probable that he never thought of his character sketches as taken from life, but rather as themes on which to improvise in a witty and graceful or pious manner. Although Hall has more insight into character than Breton and is somewhat less affected, his contribution to this type of writing is not more substantial. Breton experimented consciously with style and with combining character and essay, and however inadequate the results, they were of service to the development of English prose.

Overbury, whose characters were published in 1614, is a clever,

vigorous writer, sharper and more satirical than Breton, often bitter and abusive, but showing a command of language that is at once original and exact. His use of figures is apt indeed. But although he is more vivid than Breton, he has scarcely as much ability with character; he is interested in the accidents, rather than the essence of character, and in sharp, epigrammatic description. With him, the character sketch swerves far wide of the Theophrastian tradition. It is merely the plain song on which to play the variations of his wit. Breton stands midway between the two conceptions. He follows Hall in his adaptation of the Theophrastian character to English, but is prone to lay more emphasis on the graces of his style than the versimilitude of his characters. Breton's sketch is never given over wholly to a display of wit; it has its basis in morality, and displays some knowledge of the enduring traits of mankind. If he lacks the point and vigor of Overbury, he lacks also his abusiveness, never failing to let the good that is in man have a fair chance with the bad. His characters are prefaced with the hope that none may take offence, that those who find themselves among the worthies may remain there, and that those among the unworthies may mend their ways. Overbury's sketches, on the other hand, are noteworthy for their vivid portrayal of Tudor life and for the vigor and finish of his style.

After Breton the number of character writers became legion. John Stephens, Henry Parrot, John Earle, Wye Saltonstall, Richard Flecknoe, Thomas Fuller, Owen Feltham, Samuel Butler, and a host of others followed in the train either of Hall and Breton, or of the witty, topical satire of Overbury and his friends. It remained for John Stephens, a young lawyer to write the character sketch as we know it today, to discover the individual beneath the type, and to fuse apothegm and pointed description and comment into a unified sketch. His *Essays And Characters, Ironick And Instructive* came in 1615, the year of Breton's *Characters Upon Essaies*. Stephens' "characters" are full of personal observation; they are sprightly without being mannered, and informed with a deep interest in human nature and a curiosity that goes beyond surface traits. The "ranke observer," mocking at all humours, makes them a part of him-

self. Arrogant of his knowledge, he thinks what he has observed of men excuses him from the labor of reading. Unwilling to undergo the effort of analysis and classification, he judges trivial and great things to be of the same value. Stephens' observation of character is more penetrating than Breton's and his style less mannered. It was not until the eighteenth century that Breton's attempt to combine character and essay developed into the *Sir Roger de Coverley Papers*; where an urbane comment on men and things is illustrated by lively pen sketches of typical characters of the day. To have anticipated these papers even in a vague way is no small honor.

BRETON AS ESSAYIST

Although the seventeenth century character with its rigid conventions and self-conscious artistry of style enjoyed a wide vogue in its own day, it appeals to us chiefly because of its seeming quaintness and the light it turns upon Jacobean manners and customs. It was inevitable that these characters should be expanded and amplified and finally absorbed in a running commentary upon life—a transition to which Breton's *Characters Upon Essais* bears witness. At the end of the seventeenth century, the character showed a tendency toward a greater discursiveness and a wider satire. During the eighteenth century, the static properties of the sketch were superseded by an interplay of character; biographical details were added; action introduced, and comment upon character and ideas made, conditions which gave rise to the *Sir Roger de Coverley Papers*. Although something of the seventeenth century character has survived in Lamb's memorable paper upon his relations, it almost invariably appears today as an integral part of the essay. It has become a hand-maid to its nearest relation.

Throughout the seventeenth century, however, the two forms developed side by side, the essay turning to its neighbour for greater concreteness, and the character becoming less affected and more thoughtful from its association with the essay. The soil of the essay had long been in preparation. Not only the "character," but the dialogue, devotional tract, rogue pamphlet, personal letter, and collections of proverbs and apothegms had

helped to prepare the way. In a sense this new genre is the outgrowth of the alert, inquisitive Renaissance mind interested in everything about it and finally in its own process of thought. Moreover the pamphleteers and essayists of the period found example among the ancients for writing out their thoughts in brief, tentative fashion and for comment upon the world of affairs. The Jacobean age, on which the shadow of seriousness had already fallen, had not far to seek for subject-matter. Travel had become the vogue, and with it the mannerisms and vices of the continent; the fashions and foibles of women then as in the Middle Ages sharpened the pen of the satirist; and the attempts of London burghers to climb into eminence through marriage called for uproarious laughter and broad caricature. These same burghers and their fellow tradesmen took a lively interest in the pamphlet literature of the day—in jests and domestic brawls, witchcraft and the horrors of the plague, cony-catching and thievery of all sorts, the tricks of whores, the infidelities of citizen's wives, the escapades of young gallants, the ill effects of usury, the schemes of Jesuits and traitors to crown or church, the antics of foreigners in England—the drunken Dutchmen, smelling of butter as though he were anointed for the itch, and guided only by the mouth, or the bragging Welshman never tired of poetry talk; the customs of ordinaries and taverns and dicing houses, the walks of St. Paul's and the fashions that prevail there, the evil practices of unworthy lawyers and physicians and apothecaries and quacks of various types, and the abuses of justice. But in the midst of this pamphlet literature, gentler voices arose above the din of satire and comedy, at times the authentic tones of the familiar essay. Sights and sound of Merrie England, when Yuletide cheer and festivity are abroad, when not a cup of drink must pass without a carol, and tables are laden with fowl and fish and venison and wine, and the "youth show their agility in shooting of the wild mare," and dancing and piping drive away sorrow—all this gaiety and old-time hospitality come up to us out of the pages of Nicholas Breton. Sir William Cornwallis receives the reader in his armchair and gown, chatting of his hopes and sorrows and sore trials of the spirit, even his prejudices; he tells us how his essays were conceived and written, and as a sweet confidence

how the most acceptable treasure of his life has been his son, "in whose time of growing meete to see the world, I examined often how to fitte my selfe for his approach." And toward the end of this period came the serene little essays of Sir William Temple, with their warm rich praise of the English turf, English fruits, and the English climate, and their fleeting glimpses into the personality of the first and finest gardener in English literature.

We are concerned here with two types of essays—the familiar and aphoristic, and by way of contrast with the formal. The familiar essay is to be distinguished from the treatise or formal essay, which developed somewhat later, by its tentative quality, its subjectivity, the informal relations it establishes with the reader, and the spontaneous colloquialism of its style which conceals all trace of art behind an urbane front. The author may be a spiritual exile, standing somewhat aloof from the world of action to test its validity, but the diversity of his interests and breadth of sympathy, his entire lack of pretension and indefinable grace of manner bring him into the midst of a very choice fellowship indeed. This is the original conception of the essay brought into England in 1603 by John Florio's two translations of Montaigne and here given an extensive cultivation. Many of the seventeenth century essayists in England describe their art as light sallies or fragments. Cornwallis modestly declares that he has been "but newly bound Prentice to the inquisition of knowledge," and in another essay describes how he sits down in an ale house, having heard his host out, with no other company but ink and paper, to write out his thoughts instead of talking. Although some of these statements arise from a sense of modesty, others are an attempt to give the differentia of a new genre. The aphoristic essay, on the other hand, is little more than a series of apothegms or pregnant sayings very often designed to illustrate wisdom and expediency in the conduct of one's life. Bacon's earlier essays, coming in 1597, seventeen years after the first edition of Montaigne, gave classic expression to this type. Although Bacon uses the same title as Montaigne and describes his work as "fragments of my conceites," he has no relationship other than this to the self revelation of Montaigne and his discursive informality of manner. Bacon's style is a triumph of compression, and although disconnected, is packed tight with thought. The

1625 edition of his essays shows a closer approximation to the spirit of Montaigne; he has expanded his thought, drawing on his own experience and the example of the ancients, to illustrate his conclusions.¹

Breton shows both tendencies in his work. His contribution to the essay consists of *Characters Upon Essaies*, discussed under the character, *Fantasticks* in 1626, and parts of the dialogues, devotional tracts, and letters. Moreover his collection of proverbs and apothegms and the *Figure Of Foure* entered to the Stationers' Register as early as 1597, contain many fruitful essay topics. I have noted before that *Characters Upon Essaies*, published eighteen years after Bacon's first essays strives to attain the chiselled precision of thought and expression of its model. Breton begins with a definition or comparison in the manner of Bacon, proceeds by enumerating sententious statements, and by piling up balanced and parallel clauses which give the effect of economy and significance to the thought, and closes with a terse little comment or summary. This is in the main, Bacon's method with the essay. In other places, however, Breton approaches the mood and style of the familiar essay, and in *Fantasticks* becomes a light essayist in his own right. Some of his earlier work, though not written in essay form, reveals the subjectivity, discursiveness, and whimsicality of the familiar essay. When we consider that the *Wil of Wit*, some of the dialogues of which contain essay passages, was entered to the Stationers' Register in 1580, and *Maries Exercise*, similar to the essay in mood and subject-matter, in 1595, and that *Wits Trenchmour* with its whimsical talk of the qualities of fish and the art of fishing and its marked subjective nature, was published in 1597, it seems not unfair to give Breton the honor of having been one of the earliest familiar essayists in English, if not the earliest. Although these papers are not called essays and are informed very often with a moral purpose, the major part of the work tends toward the personal essay.

If, however, we consider *Fantasticks* Breton's only real contribution to the familiar essay, then he has various predecessors in the field. Sir William Cornwallis has four books of essays to his credit

¹ Crane, R. S., "The Relation Of Bacon's Essays To His Program For The Advancement of Learning"; Thompson, E. N. S., *The Seventeenth-Century English Essay*; Routh, H. V., "The Origins Of The Essay Compared In French and English Literature," *Modern Language Review*, XV, 1920.

—*Essayes* in 1600, the *Second Part of Essayes* in 1601, which includes those of the 1600 edition, with additional papers of the same nature; *Essayes* or rather *Encomions*, *Prayses of Sadnesse: and of the Emperour Julian the Apostate*, 1616, and *Essayes Of Certaine Paradoxes* in 1616. The little papers of the 1600 and 1601 collections are concerned with resolution, discourse, fame, ambition, behaviour, and the like, and a consideration of how men rise to eminence and the lets and hindrances of high place. Although he gives the impression of writing himself in the easy, informal manner of Montaigne, he is more dogmatic, and at times disconnected rather than expansive and discursive in Montaigne's fashion. Since Florio's translation of Montaigne came in 1603, Cornwallis must have known the genial Frenchman in the original—he follows the example of his essay without having any, or much of Montaigne's charm and ease of manner.

Cornwallis thinks ambition a spur to industry even sharper than virtue, and worthy to be encouraged, provided man is just, temperate, and virtuous in his pursuits. He despises the man, who, in his endeavour to reach high place, falls into the worship of greatness. A man may very well follow the wisdom of his superiors, but should not feel bound to act as the register of their glories, nor to prostrate himself before them. Achievement must not be considered an end in itself, nor any trick of pride or over-evaluation be allowed to mar it. Rather a man should equal or surpass his own good actions again and again. Cornwallis never falls into the error of allowing too much credit to effort or ambition—he is very sensitive to the differences in society which, if rightly observed, make for harmony. All that he says about ambition and fame and keeping state is wise and well considered, but the essays go beyond mere aids to worldly success—they are informed throughout with a very sincere love of virtue for its own sake. He attempts to clear away the confusions from human behaviour, to find the essence of goodness, and to point the way to its attainment in a sensible manner. His study of the ancients gave him an admiration for fortitude, patience, and temperance, the most difficult of all the virtues because most contrary to our appetites, but crowned with the most resplendent shining of all, and for manliness, courage, and wisdom. He admires Plato because he was content to give men knowledge on condition that they be honest. This is a far cry from Bacon's worldly wisdom.

He says that death, which to some is the chief instrument of fear, is past fear because men are sure of it, and must therefore accept it with courage and resignation.

Within the compass of his essays, Cornwallis sets up an ideal of culture, reminiscent of Montaigne. Cornwallis admires the man of general knowledge, not top-heavy with book-learning or warped by preoccupation with a special science or profession, who can turn all things to use, and be all things to all men, who can "hawke with the faulkoner, hunt with hunters, talke of Husbandry with the servants of Thrift: be amorous with the Italian, and drinke with the Dutch: whose conversation is apposite rather than 'finical' or learned, and who is ready with any kindness provided it shorten not in the spending." His ideal of culture is broader than that of most of his contemporaries, providing for the education of women, and "then doubtless they would be as fearlesse as wee are."

But the formulation of a wise and altogether balanced philosophy in these essays is not their only claim to attention. I have noted before the traces of the light essayist in Cornwallis. The reader is invited to share in his prejudices and admirations and learns not a little about his disposition. In spite of his stoic philosophy, Cornwallis finds it hard to endure wrongs equably: he has a fine scorn for the man who cringes to his superiors, and hates all flattery, the "hand looking one way and our heart another." He dislikes boorishness and pedantry, preferring to see a man carry his learning with ease, and deplores the effects of great reading on minds not capable of digesting it. In Cornwallis' strictures upon University conversation as too "finical" and his belief that a man of the world ought to meet all men in their proper quality, we are reminded of Montaigne's admiration of pertinent discourse where good judgment, freedom, and gaiety prevail.¹ The *Essayes of Certaine Paradoxes*, except for their occasional coarseness, are quite in the light essay vein, turning truth merrily to jest, singing the praise of sadness or of nothing in much the same manner in which Lamb in the nineteenth century praises the chimney sweep or complains of the decay of beggars. Again the author establishes the proposition that it is good to be in debt, the condition being universal, and the creditor forced to cap and crouch to the debtor as though he were a

¹ Montaigne, "Of Three Commerces," ed., Saintsbury, G. 1892-3.

king. These papers approach at least one phase of the personal essay.

Cornwallis and Breton have little in common, except the moral point of view and their relation to the books of courtesy and the familiar essay. Cornwallis is more confidential with the reader; his essays are fuller, but his subject-matter and purpose are not as close to the familiar essay as Breton's. His first two books are concerned with statescraft, and the *Essayes of Certaine Paradoxes* belong to the paradox rather than the essay. Breton very often writes with no more serious purpose than to beguile time; he is interested in whimsicalities of no importance whatsoever except to the light essayist, and is prone to daff aside even his most serious comments with a jest. Finally, although Cornwallis is a better writer, there is nothing in him to compare with *Fantasticks* in mood and subject matter and purpose the stuff of the light essay.

The essayists who come after Cornwallis are closer than Cornwallis to at least one part of Breton's work, his terse, sententious essays in imitation of Bacon. Robert Johnson's *Essaies or Rather Imperfect Offers* in 1601 treat of greatness of mind, education, wisdom, experience, travel, and reputation, and lighter matters such as wit, jests, exercise, affability, and speech. Johnson is a disciple of Bacon. His essays are much more prudential and directly educative than Cornwallis', and less concerned with virtue than with the direct means to success. The means of gaining experience which he cites are an illustration of his practical point of view—provide against the beginning of evil, accompany all actions with a good color, dissemble according to the needs and fashions of the time, settle more assurance in him who expects something of you than in him who has received, to forestall envy, attribute your success to fortune, and to the same purpose use your success for virtue. These papers resemble *Characters Upon Essaies* in form. They begin with a terse definition, continue very often with a series of definitive statements, and close with an aphorism or summary. But the spirit of expediency which actuates them has no kinship with Breton's kindly piety and conventional moralizing.

Johnson is followed in this field by *Essaies Politicke and Morall*, 1608, and *Essaies Morall and Theologicall*, 1609, both written by D. T., who is generally thought to have been David Tuvill. These

are two formless volumes of anecdotes out of antiquity with only an occasional comment or attempt at discussion, and concerned in the main with success in public life. The first book discusses persuasion, praise, industry, reputation, the force of reason, and certain cautions in friendship; the second policy and religion, civil carriage, alms, respect and benefits, and the like. The thought is sometimes effective: good things lose the grace of their goodness when not performed in a gracious manner; virtue will not admit facility for her companion, and what is in the heart of the sober is in the tongue of the drunkard. The next book of essays—*New Essayes: Meditations, And Vowes: Including in them the Chiefe Duties of a Christian, both for Faith, and Manners*, 1614, by T. T.—resembles *Divine Considerations* in subject matter, though much less prolix, and richer in thought. Overbury added to the 1614 edition of his characters a group of sparkling little essays, sometimes hardly more than a series of pungent observation and epigrams, but so apposite and full of thought as to deserve consideration among the essays. Overbury was a man of the world and his observations have a sophistication that at times approaches wisdom. On the whole, however, he is much closer the epigram than the essay. Another essayist to follow the pithy, sententious style of Bacon is Richard Brathwaite, whose *Essaies Upon The Five Senses* came in 1614. In spite of rhetorical flourish and quaint devices, his thought is at times sound and effective and phrased with dignity.

But these essays were becoming more and more disconnected, approaching the epigram, and paradox, and “lessons,” and collections of proverbs popular throughout the century. It is with John Stephens’ *Satyricall Essayes Characters And Others* in 1615, the year of *Characters Upon Essaies*, that we are again in the realm of the essay proper. Stephens’ discussions of high birth, disinheritance, poetry, and discontents are somewhat rambling, but sound and thoughtful; they are less given to rhetorical flourish than Breton’s *Characters Upon Essaies* and more connected. He discusses disinheritance rather than merely defining or describing it, and deplores the churlishness of parents who lean more toward austerity than indulgence and punish their children for faults that might have been corrected by a wiser training. Stephens and Breton are alike in their kindly charity

toward all men and in their conception of a gentleman. Stephens says that it is not enough for a man to be well born, but that he must deserve his station in life if honor is to be more than a name. The difference between men does not reside in birth alone, but largely in the manner in which they shape their lives. These two sets of essays have little else in common, however. Stephens writes both characters and essays, but keeps them apart; Breton tries to combine the two forms: Stephens follows the tradition of Montaigne, and Breton, in this volume, the Baconian example.

Breton's *Fantasticks* brings us into the charmed circle of the familiar essay. These papers serve no ulterior purpose, are not concerned with statescraft or moral guidance for the individual, but exist only to impart something of the beauty of the English country-side and to describe the daily round of activity in town and country. Although not subjective in our sense of the word, they are somewhat informal in manner. Breton discusses the world, love, and money, and then describes the seasons of the year, the months in their turn, and the hours of the day with all their manifold activities. The method is the same as that of *Characters Upon Essaies*—a definitive statement, followed by a series of descriptive details, and a terse little summary in conclusion—but the effect is entirely different. Every detail carries a vivid image and contributes to the dominant impression of the whole. The style is simple and colloquial and the pattern not obtrusive. I think there is nothing in Breton's predecessors or contemporaries, except in really great writers, to equal these little vignettes of the seventeenth century with their loving observation and sweet savour of country-life, and the voices of bell-man and watch, warrener and husbandman coming up to us out of the past. At one of the clock, the watch having gone his rounds falls asleep on a stall and the bell-man calls the hour, warning maids to look to their locks, the fire, and the light; at two of the clock, the warrener begins to draw homeward, the husbandman to rouse himself, and the seaman, looking out for light, calls for a can of beer if the wind be fair. At three of the clock there is a stir of activity through the household; the milk-maid turns to the dairy; the porridge is put on for the servants' breakfast; the ploughman harnesses his horses, and the thresher

makes his way toward the barn. At four of the clock the cock crows lustily; the horses are at their chaff and provender, and the servants at their breakfast; and the beggars, rousing themselves from the hedge, begin to ply their morning craft. At five o'clock the bell rings to prayer; the streets are full of people, and the scholars are on their way to school; the "wheele goes merrily, while the mistresse is by"; capons and chickens must be served without delay; the blind fiddler is up with his dance and song; the traveller is well on his way, and the carter whistles merrily to his horse. Of the sixth hour, Breton writes: "It is now the first houre, the sweet time of the morning, and the Sunne at every window calls the Sleepers from their beds; the Marygold beginnes to open her leaves, and the dew on the ground doth sweeten the Ayre."

And so the morning wears on until at eleven, school is broken up; the lawyer returns to his home, the merchant to the exchange, and the gallant to the ordinary. At the rich man's house the page stands ready with knife and trencher, and the meat is half cold before the guests are seated; the children are called to say grace before dinner; the gate is locked against beggars, and the minstrel must stand ready to play. At twelve the merchant keeps shop while the servant goes to dinner; the laborer draws out his dinner from a bag, and "Duke Humphreys servants make their walkes in Paules."

The description of the months and festivals of the year are beautiful indeed, showing a close observation of the habits of country people, and a fine zest for the good things of life. The little essay on December is flooded with good cheer. Capons, hens, turkies, geese, and ducks must all be killed; plums and spice, sugar and honey "square it among the pies and broth," and "Gossip I drinke to you," and "you are welcome," and "I pray you be merrie" are heard on all sides. On Christmas day the wine flows; cards and dice purge many a purse; the Lord of Mis-rule is no mean personage; while pitfalls are set for the birds and alms-baskets sent to the poor; maskers and mummers make merry, and hospitality, remembrance of friends and of Christ are in order. Mention of games and sports is frequent, dancing, fencing, tennis, shooting the wild mare, "shuttle-cocke with the Batteldoore," balloon-play, and even football.

A radiant freshness rests over the descriptions of country scenes, as of a lark over wet meadows. The natural grace and ease of expression, the touch of lyricism, the imaginative use of figure, and their serenity of mood give these little sketches an enduring value. Almost every sentence carries a similitude—the earth nipt at heart with a cold, or the prisoner's heart nipt with penury, the meadow grounds gaping for rain, time stepping out of the darkness, the leaves of the trees in whisper talk of the blessings of the air, dew hanging like pearls on the tops of the grass, and Boreas filling his cheeks with breath against the coming of March—images such as these rise in rich profusion. The image is never carried too far nor wrenched out of its natural associations as in earlier works of Breton. Although the sentences are long and loose, they are without affectation, and are in keeping with the subject-matter. As in the poetry of the Romantic period, ideas or scenes are surrounded here by every beautiful detail imaginable until the picture is complete. The description of April will serve as an illustration and a fitting close to this discussion.

"It is now April, and the Nightingale begins to tune her throat against May; the sunny showers perfume the aire, and the Bees begin to goe abroad for honey; the Dewe, as in Pearles, hangs upon the tops of the grasse, while the Turtles sit billing upon the little greene boughes; the Trowt begins to play in the Brookes, and the Sammon leaves the Sea, to play in the fresh waters. The garden-bankes are full of gay flowers, and the Thorne and the Plumme send forth their faire Blossomes; the March colt begins to play, and the Cosset Lamb is learned to butt."¹

BRETON'S PROSE STYLE

When Nicholas Breton began his series of prose tracts in 1580, there were three fairly distinct prose styles current—the learned, the courtly, and the vernacular—and a theory of style which sought to comprehend the humbler and more intimate uses of life as well as the rhetorical demands of the forum. The learned style was cultivated by the earlier humanists, who were interested in developing a literary prose within the vernacular and whose

¹ *Fantasticks*, p. 8.

reference for a standard of excellence was to the classics, especially to Cicero, who had always been the guiding star of conservative stylists. The courtly style, an extension of the humanistic endeavour to elevate the vernacular, was given its vogue by John Lyly and somewhat differently by Sir Philip Sidney. Although not based on classical models, the courtly style resembles that of the humanists in its insistence that literature be removed as far as possible from the uses of market place and daily life and in its appeal to the ear. Figures of sound rather than of wit or imagination are the basis of Lyly's style, and to a lesser extent, of Sidney's Arcadianism. Foreign influences, especially that of the Spanish humanist Guevara, were important in crystallizing the courtly manner into form, as was also the preoccupation with style for its own sake which follows almost inevitably upon an awakened interest in language. The vernacular is opposed alike to the dominance of classical ideals and to the tendency toward virtuosity inherent in Euphuism. A style appropriate to the uses of the forum, but not to the council chamber and study, or to the court and forest of Arcadia, but not to the simpler needs of everyday, was sure to be challenged sooner or later, and from this challenge arose the vernacular for purely utilitarian purposes and the prose of men like Bacon and Jonson, not stripped of ornament, and not chained to mean or practical uses, but devoted to any service the mind could devise. The vernacular enjoyed a wide vogue in historical writings and translations, dialogues, such as Bulletin's *Book Against the Fever Pestilence*, the sermons of Latimer the letters of Sir Thomas More, parts of the drama, the pamphlet literature of the day, and the essays of Bacon and the prose of Jonson, though here of course we have the vernacular tempered by reference to the classics.

The learned style arose naturally enough from the desire of scholars to render service to their native tongue. Humanists like Lydgate, Caxton, Skelton, Elyot, Bishop Fisher, Sir Thomas More, and Roger Ascham, actuated by this patriotic aim, endeavoured to make the vernacular a fit and dignified instrument of thought and to give it the eloquence and repose of classical Latin. It is important to note that this reform was concerned largely with structure and very little with vocabulary. English

scholars were attracted by the music of Cicero's prose, his amplitude and eloquence, and tried to introduce some of this rhythmical beauty into English and to construct sentences that would have the full dignity and complication of thought. Of the devices used in this reform, the periodic sentence with long rolling cadences is most common. The ancients were much preoccupied with the theory of prose rhythm, and were careful to place their cadences at strategic points in the sentence. It is to the credit of English humanists that they did not follow Cicero slavishly; their practice was eclectic and their aim to make English worthy of carrying serious thought, rather than to wrest it out of its natural course into a conformity with Latin usage. The debt of English to these humanists can hardly be overstated. They gave to English prose, which was prone to sprawl, a sense of form and a controlling purpose, and made it clear that the vernacular could be turned to any use, however serious or important. The sacrifice which scholars thought was involved in using the vernacular rather than Latin is attested by Roger Ascham's well known words in the preface to *Toxophilus*: "And though to have written in an other tonge, had beene bothe more profitable for my study and also more honest for my name, yet I can thinke my labour wel bestowed, yf with a little hynderaunce of my profyt and name, maye come any fourtheraunce to the pleasure or commoditie of the gentlemen and yeomen of Englande."¹ The apology itself is a fair example of the learned style.²

It is only a step from the humanist's endeavour to make prose more stately and harmonious by following classical precedent to the efforts of the Euphuists to gain emphasis through the use of antithesis and repetition. The humanist is concerned with style as a worthy instrument of thought; the Euphuist considers style almost as an end in itself. The manner of saying a thing becomes of first importance. It is not enough that English prose be serviceable; it must become the expression of fine gentlemen, foregoing the causal usages of market and street, and conforming to a highly elaborate pattern. The Euphuist tries to write with

¹ Ascham, *Toxophilus* ed. Arber.

² For a further discussion of the learned style, the reader is referred to Krapp, G. P., *The Rise of English Literary Prose*; Clark, A. C., "Ciceronianism" in Gordon, *English Literature And The Classics*.

delicacy and precision and to give significance to his thought by the use of antithesis and repetition. It is important to remember, however, that Euphuism is concerned with grammatical structure and not with vocabulary and that it ought therefore never to be confused with a merely florid style or a poetical one, either of which may depend on vocabulary and subject-matter rather than style for its quality. Another characteristic of the courtly manner of writing is the use of schemes rather than tropes—antithesis, alliteration, balance, repetition, and word-play in place of figures depending upon ideas. Although the seeds of Euphuism were sown far back in the Middle Ages, the style was formulated and given its vogue as is well known by Lyly, whose prose is characterized by alliteration, simple and transverse, balance and antithesis, rhetorical question and answer, strings of epithets and similitude and allusions to classical and mythical history. The excesses into which an elaborate and highly artificial style such as this is prone to lead were checked somewhat by Sidney's courtly prose, which held in leash the use of antithesis and alliteration and avoided the formalism of the Euphuistic sentence pattern.¹ Sidney's style is characterized by the use of striking and sometimes extravagant imagery and ingenious phrasing, and by a long, loose, episodic sentence, with elaborate parentheses interwoven, rising with ease to its conclusion without being allowed to stray out of bounds. The experiments of the courtly writers were important in making English sensitive to its capabilities as an art and in freeing it alike from the dominance of a purely arbitrary standard of excellence and from the eccentricities of an untutored use of language.

There remains the popular style in part an evolution of the bourgeois literature of the Middle Ages and in part a challenge to the oratorical tradition imposed by scholar and courtier alike. The humanists were following an outworn rhetorical tradition, and the later Euphuists had come to employ style as an exercise in virtuosity. Either conception was objectionable to men like Bacon and Jonson, whose aim was to write a clear, serviceable English. There was a concerted attempt during the seventeenth

¹ See Krapp, G. H., *The Rise of English Literary Prose*, 1915; Schelling, F., *English Literature During The Life Time of Shakespeare*, 1910.

century to use a style which would have the colloquial ease of conversation, and its appropriateness, the brevity and accuracy required of science, and the mobility and complication of thought. The essayists concerned in this movement turned to Seneca for their standard, and the pamphleteers who thronged the churchyard of St. Paul's to vend their wares or to gather new material for their facile pens had only to follow their own inclinations. Lyly's attempt to treat prose as an art was important at court and to the future of English prose, but had little effect on these obscure pamphleteers who turned out paper on paper with amazing celerity. Nor had the refinements of the humanists a place here. The pamphleteers wrote in a colloquial manner, conforming to no fixed standard, indulging a tendency to quaintness or eccentricity at times, but with an eye constantly on reality and the picturesque. Their style is sometimes homely and unmannered, or familiar and easy in the mood of the light essayist, informed with vigor as in Nash, or touched with passion as in parts of Greene and Dekker. There are inevitable defects in this prose, however, as contrasted with the other more studied styles. The vernacular is given to uneven starts of eloquence and bright patches; it is often loose and desultory, and in its attempt to be honest and plain, merely coarse. The defect of the courtly style is too much art, the defect of the vernacular too little. Theorists like Bacon and Jonson did much to correct the provincialism and formlessness of the vernacular. They joined voices in insisting upon a "strict and succinct style." Jonson knew that the style of the market place and of literature could never be one and the same thing; he admired "pure and neat language," free from barbarisms and eccentricity as from an excess of art, and always corrected by that unconscious standard which Matthew Arnold terms the "prose of the center." But in the main, the vernacular had only the merit of being honest and homely. It might be eloquent as in Dekker, or sincere and colloquial as in Breton; it was usually vivid and lit up with occasional beauty, but lacking in form and a guiding principle.

Many conditions are responsible for the growth of the vernacular. In the first place there was a spread of interest in writing about things downward socially from the scholar and the gentle-

man to the man in the street. With the increased wealth incident upon a quiet reign and added opportunities for leisure, the growth of city life, and the rise of a strong, independent middle class, the demand for literature set in humble surroundings, or the walks of St. Paul's, or the homes of substantial citizens who had acquired, along with their wealth, a taste for the arts became too insistent for denial. The pamphleteers who turned out their penny wares in answer to this demand were sometimes in full sympathy with what they sketched, their eye faithfully on the subject, and again were moved by the reformer's zeal to change and improve. The use of prose in drama to express farce or satire or conversation in a lower key went hand in hand with the growth of the vernacular in social literature. Moreover the esteem in which the native language was held by the humanists did more than any other single thing to insure the growth of this literature. During the early part of Queen Elizabeth's reign, it had still been possible for a boy to learn Latin by hearing it spoken. But with the downfall of the old learning and the consequent inability to read and write the classical languages with ease came the desire for adequate expression in the native tongue, and the reforms of the humanists to that end. The fact that the pulpit was turning the vernacular to good use, the example of controversial pieces written in English, the insistence of the translators that the classics be rendered into a pure, everyday English, and the works of men like Hakluyt and Holinshed and Harrison are manifestations of the growth of the vernacular. Finally, English writers had before them the example of a successful use of the vernacular in Italy.¹ Dante had witnessed to the world once and for all time that the native tongue can sound all the harmonies known to man, and Boccaccio in this very period was turning it to a brilliant if less inspired use in his stories taken from middle-class life. Castiglione's *Cortegiano* offered another proof of the validity of the native tongue. The pamphleteers and essayists had ample precedent for the use of the vernacular; it had undergone experiment and development at the hands of the humanists and the courtly writers, and offered a brilliant career to one who could make it respond to the public taste.

¹ Conley, C. H., *The First English Translators of the Classics*, 1927.

Breton is distinctly a popular writer with now and then a trace of Euphuism. He writes in an easy, colloquial manner, always leisurely in its pace, as though time were his to command and his only concern beguiling the hours of a long afternoon. Sometimes he catches the tones of familiar talk or the buoyancy and verve of repartee, or etches little scenes from the country-side with a few sharp strokes of his pencil, or sends up a prayer to heaven on the wings of fervent, rhythmical speech. He is never labored, writing with the unstudied grace of an amateur sensitive to the beauty of field and meadow and to the power of language to open the door upon that beauty. Even his mannerisms are not forced. This facility however very often becomes a flaw, his pen running on to pile image on image, and phrase on phrase, in an effort to say all that his fertile mind can compass. He seems never to have stopped for revision. The style at times glows with the beauty of imagery or is touched with unconscious grace in the description of nature, falls again into a pedestrian stride with advice to offer or a long story to tell, or becomes entirely futile in the endless play on words and bandying about of ideas.

Breton uses a long, loose, garrulous sentence. We come to what seems to be the end of a thought only to find that the author has started all over again, another pause, and he finds something more to say or thinks of a similar or contrasted idea, then a fresh start, and so on until he becomes weary and gives up the game. Breton doubles back on himself again and again. At other times, he builds a long, episodic sentence in the manner of Sidney, with phrases and parentheses neatly dovetailed into the whole: "finding my bodie not answerable to my minde, and the gaines of my adventure no greater then would defraie the charges of my necessarie expences: I left the field, and tooke me to my chamber, where resolved to betake my selfe wholly to my booke: I fell soundly to the study of the law: in which, when I had so profited, that I was able to pleade a case, and iudge betwixt right and wrong, I had that care of my conscience, that of poore men I would take no money, and of the rich I would not be bribed, etc."¹ I have noted in the discussion of *Characters Upon Essaies* and the *Good And The Badde* the use of sentences made up of a long

¹ "Grimellos Fortunes," *Works of Breton*, p. 7.

series of comparisons. The sentence combining contrasted ideas and balanced structure is sometimes used with marked effectiveness. "An honest man is like a plaine coate, which without welt or gard, keepeth the body from the winde and weather and being well made fits him best who weares it."¹ I have illustrated the use of antithesis, which appears again and again in *Characters Upon Essaies*, in my discussion of the "character." A sentence with a series of phrases of equal length occurs frequently: "we may ioy in the enjoyinge of o^r present kinge: in vertue as gracious, in wisdom as divine, in learning as studious, in iudgment as iust,"² etc. The device of building phrases, clauses, or short questions up to a climax occurs very often in the *Character of Queen Elizabeth*: "during her lief what peace in her country? what plentie in her land? what triumphs in her Court?" and so on, one climax sometimes giving way to another which immediately follows. There are many long sentences in a *Murmurer*, with subordinate elements of equal length and similar construction: "Murmure not at the tribute thou payest him, for all thou hast is too little for his service: Murmure not at the Service thou dost him, for thou canst never do him ynough for his worthines: Murmure not at thy want of his bountie, least he see more thy greedinesse then good wil."³ Perhaps this is enough to illustrate the long, loose character of Breton's sentences and the absence of preconceived plan. He makes a quick start and then goes off again and again like a repeating gun. If the first part of the sentence is periodic, the author is sure to think of qualifying or new ideas to add. There are a few exceptions, however. The short transitional sentence appears occasionally. *The Courtier And The Country-Man* portrays a judicious variety in sentence length. The sentences of *Characters Upon Essaies* and the *Good And The Badde* are sometimes short and pithy, or, if long, give the impression of brevity through the use of parallel and contrasted clauses that might very well stand alone.

Breton's vocabulary is large and in the main concrete. It is not the vocabulary of any particular walk of life, but of one at home in court or market-place or country, and carries the tones

¹ "The Good And The Badde," *Works of Breton*, p. 11.

² "Character of Queen Elizabeth," *ibid.*, p. 7.

³ "A Murmuer," *ibid.*, p. 7.

and overtones of everyday conversation. Chremes rebukes his son for preferring wisdom to money: "Yea, how can that bee? what honor is there without money? the best Scholler without money may make a hard dinner, and goe in a threed-bare Coate: and for all his grace in the Schooles, have little grace in the world."¹ Most of the dialogues have the colloquial ease of talk taken from real life. I have illustrated before Breton's use of the canting dialect of roguery in some of his dialogues. Although not as adept with this vocabulary as Greene, who knew all too much of the underworld, he visits his "die doppers" and apple squires and setters with a degree of reality. Scriptural speech is almost instinctive with him. Then there are the choice and sometimes high-flown terms of romance in *Strange Fortunes* and that of passion in some of his letters. Legal and commercial terms are frequent, as are references to games and pastimes and music. The language of *Fantasticks* is particularly vivid and concrete. Breton is not a man of special knowledge—even his references to the country are somewhat general—but he too in his way seems to have had an "experiencing nature" and to have touched life at many points.

I have discussed Breton's use of similitudes in various parts of this paper. The imagery is beautiful when touched with devotion and when tracing the lineaments of the countryside, or homely and apt when an honest man is compared to a plain coat, an old man to a lute with strings all broken or to a withered tree that has lost its sap, and a wise man to a clock that never strikes but at its home. Although Breton knew and loved the country, his similitudes drawn from it are rather general—a girl sits looking into her mirror as demurely as a rabbit washing its face on a sunny morning, a soldier marching as if at plough, the meadows gaping for rain, the sun withdrawn into his bedchamber, the lark setting the morning watch, and the nightingale the evening, the windows of heaven beginning to open at three in the morning, and time drawing back the curtain of night. The letters, devotional tracts, and *Fantasticks* have the most beautiful images. Breton often loses in effectiveness by employing strings of comparisons, or by clouding the thought with a too great diversity of

¹ "An Olde Mans Lesson And A Young Mans Love," *Works of Breton*, p. 6.

images, or by wrenching a similitude out of its native surroundings. He is fond of personifying abstractions and of describing by means of a series of metaphors. This is another manifestation of his facility. He is not content with one or two beautiful images, but must surround the object with as many comparisons as come to mind.

Breton has a wealth of anecdote and quaint knowledge at his command. His illustrations are usually very apposite and well subordinated to the passage as a whole, but sometimes get the better of the author, leading him into a bewildering maze of anecdote and incident. *I Pray You Be Not Angry* is little more than a series of broad, farcical stories which savour of the bourgeois tale of the Middle Ages. The stories used as illustrations are more interesting. To show the futility of bringing petty quarrels into court, a judge in *Grimellos Fortunes* relates the story of how two men, one lame and the other blind, find an oyster as they walk along the shore only to fall into a quarrel over the matter of ownership. Although the blind man has the oyster in his possession, his friend had seen it first and guided him to it. Meeting a lawyer on the way, they ask him to decide to whom the oyster belongs; whereupon, the lawyer takes out the oyster for himself and gives each of them a shell. The angler in *Wits Trenchmour* has a fund of quaint knowledge and no little skill in his craft and in describing the propensities of fish: "A whiting is so old a Courtier, that he cannot loose the credite of his service: Fresh Sammon, Sturgeon, and Conger are no victuals for poore people, especially for weake stomachs, that must have wine for digestion. Oysters are stirring meate, especially with the help of an onion: Mussles and Lobsters, Crabs and Tortus are dangerous for Agues: Smelts are good for women with child, and Shrimps are picking meate, for idle people after dinner. . . ."¹ The story, in *Strange Newes*, of how a plain dealing man cured his wife of nagging and scolding has the broad, farcical quality of mediaeval bourgeois literature. He keeps his wife's mare from water for a day and a night; then as they are riding to market, the mare, driven by thirst, runs into a mire and upsets the scold who cannot speak for the mud and water she has swallowed. At

¹ "Wits Trenchmour," p. 10.

other times, Breton relates a graceful tale in the Italian manner, reproduces a bit of clever repartee, or spins a fisherman's yarn or a tale of imaginary adventures with vigor and point. Breton is at his best in some of these short, sparkling anecdotes, where his quick wit and genial humanity and sense for what is universal in man's experience are displayed, rather than in his longer narratives of court or low life.

Although Breton is in the main a popular writer, he was not unaware of the experiments that had been made at court, and in characteristic fashion adapted them to his own purposes. The two attempts at fiction—the *Miseries of Mauillia* and the *Strange Fortunes Of Two Excellent Princes*, and the collections of character sketches and essays show unmistakable signs of Euphuism and sometimes of Sidney's use of ingenious phrasing and long, interwoven sentences. The novels in small are only vaguely reminiscent of Euphuism, however. Breton does not use strings of epithets nor make allusions to natural history; alliteration, though present, is not obtrusive, and the style of the novels cannot be reduced to a definite pattern.¹ The Euphuism which reached Breton through Greene had merged with other devices of style and become an almost unconscious part of writing. The following passage illustrates the use of antithesis, balance, alliteration, repetition, and proverbial sayings:

"Madam, to make a long harvest about a little corne, were but a weake piece of husbandrie: and therefore not to hold you with a tedious discourse in plaine tearmes, you are the card that I meane, my plaie is no iest, your love is the stake, that I would be glad if I could to win, you are the choise that I have made, and that I would bee loath to change. . . ."²

There are reminiscences of Arcadianism too, long sentences with the parts interwoven like a leafy canopy, and sometimes the delicate unreality of Sidney's background. The following sentence may be taken as an illustration:

"Me thought I was going through a thick wood, where were a number of nettes and snares, layde in everie pathe where I should passe, yet me thought I passed through them so easily, as if they

¹ Jusserand, J. J., *The English Novel In The Time of Shakespeare*.

² "Strange Fortunes Of Two Excellent Princes," *Works of Breton*, p. 11.

had beene of no strength; till at last I came towarde a great water, where neere unto the shore laie a great Boate, and from the Boate laie a long line, made all of golde and pearle; within the compasse whereof, treading yer I was aware, mee thought some thing gave a snatche, wherewith the line whipte about my middle, and carried me into the Boate, with the sodaine fright whereof I awaked."¹

The collection of 'characters' and essays, on the other hand, are more mannered. Alliteration, balance, and antithesis, word play, strings of similitudes, proverbs in great number, repetition of words or of suffixes and prefixes, and references to mythology have all a place here. The only device of Euphuism omitted is the allusion to natural history. Breton shows a tendency here, in *Necessary Notes for a Courtier*, appended to the *Court and Country*, and in the *Figure of Foure* and other pamphlets, to arrange his ideas in sets of four, a device very frequently used by Guevara. He never tires of playing with words, ideas, or proverbs. Although these mannerisms become wearisome at times, they are a sign of vitality in the use of style, and of Breton's willingness to experiment by pouring old wine into new bottles. The following description of an honest poor man has the effect of artistic economy through the use of antithesis and the brief pithy sentences of Bacon.

"An honest poore man is the prooffe of miserie; where patience is put to the trial of her strength to endure grieffe without passion in starving with concealed necessity, or standing on the adventures of charitie. If he be married, Want rings in his eares and Woe watreth his eyes. If single, he droopeth with the shame of beggary, or dies with the passion of penurie. Of the rich, he is shunned like infection and of the poore learns but a heart-breaking profession. . . . His sighes are the notes of musick and his song is like the swanne before her death. . . . In sum, he is the grieffe of Nature, the sorrow of Reason, the pitie of wisdom and the charge of charity."²

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

² "The Good And The Badde," p. 13.

SUMMARY

As some personalities interest us more for what they suggest than what they are, so Breton interests us because of his varied relations with the literary activity of the seventeenth century and his dim prescience of the future of English prose in experiments with style and form. To have anticipated even remotely the *Compleat Angler*, the *Sir Roger de Coverley* papers, and the familiar essay is no small honor. His experiments with style, coming after the excesses of Euphuism and Arcadianism had passed and when there was a conscious attempt to make English conform to the quiet needs of everyday life as well as to occasions of state and to express truth with the brevity and accuracy of science, were important indeed without any question as to the intrinsic merit of his work. And finally to have come in contact with Breton's richly dowered nature, with its sweetness and charity and sturdy independence, and his varied interests is to touch hands across the centuries with a bygone age and to see its manifold activities as a contemporary must have seen them.

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